

Metanoia

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Metanoia

by [24notfound](#)

Summary

Sapnap narrowed his eyes onto him. “He just called your father a prick and you’re smiling?”

There was a small pull at the corner of Dream’s lips, his eyes remaining on the ground. “No one has ever spoken about my father like that before.”

Sapnap scoffed. “Yeah. Because they know they’ll get *cindered* if they do.”

“Exactly.” Dream finally brought his eyes to his friend, his smile widening slightly. “Makes him that much more interesting.”

Following the death of Queen of Salacia, George is thrown into kingship. And in reluctantly preparing for an indefinite war on the account of avenging his mother, George's vision seems to get blurred by the unlikely and unexpected bond he forms with the Prince of Vulcan: Dream.

The Stupid, The Proud

Chapter Notes

hi hi hi hello.

yes this is a fantasy/royalty au yes.

if any of the cc's mentioned in this are uncomfy or not okay with this being up, bb, i'm taking this shit down asap rocky.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



George hasn't felt a thing since he was sixteen years old.

Whether that derived from the people around him dropping like flies, or simply his inability to embrace the things encouraged by the Kingdom; George wasn't sure.

And when Quackity was watching him empty his lunch out into a toilet bowl, Karl carrying him back to bed, Niki combing his hair as cold sweats peppered his forehead, and his parents witnessing him fall into a spiral of addictions, George would be asked to give it a rest.

As a prince, he had an image to uphold. Despite him not leaving the house much, or nearly at all; sometimes he would, just for the sole purpose of going to the pubs and bars in the village.

When his mother had warned him of his alarming drinking habits and how it could end in his own demise, George *wanted* to tell her that he didn't care.

Wanted to tell her that he didn't fear death; or more so, that he'd welcome it with open arms, was it to attain him.

But George didn't have the heart to tell her that, to tell any of his friends that.

So, he decided to go on about his life; merely existing for their sake. And if he *was* doing this for their sake, he figured he should be allowed the help he received from herbs and alcohol.

The visualizations he got from them added colour to the grey skies and the dark buildings that occupied the village. The alcohol coursing through his veins made the people from other realms, as well as his own, a lot more bearable to speak with.

George hadn't felt a single thing since he was sixteen years old.

But then came the day he lingered in the courtyard of the Salacia palace, awaiting his mother's return from the Kingdom's battle against an outsider realm: "The Mind".

George was only welcomed with his father's forlorn eyes before the man had fallen to his knees following a painful chorus of his cries as he mourned his wife.

That moment was the first time George had felt anything in a long while.

Felt the sudden puncture in his chest that remained for days to follow; aching painfully in his heart as he watched the grave diggers lower his mother's casket into the ground, burning like fire in his lungs when people would come up to him with their feigned tears and forced condolences.

And from that moment forward, George hadn't lived a sheer second of sobriety.

And when asked repeatedly by his father to clean up his act, George stated that he didn't want to recover.

Because his mother had now become a title cemented in cursive on an extravagant gravestone pitched into the village cemetery.

Not only was George bedridden following the funeral, but his coronation was to happen in two days. *He felt as if they barely gave him time to catch his fucking breath.*

Though George felt entirely alone where he laid in the obscurity of his bedroom—the curtains purposely drawn—his father and his best friends made sure to check in on him, taking it in turns, almost as if it were a relay race—passing the baton to the next person in private.

The first visit was from his father, the night after the funeral.

George felt bad when not responding to his father's constrained voice, but if he replied, it would only bring them closer to their breakdown.

The second visit was from Ana, the palace's chef. George felt just as bad hearing the tray of food being disposed, only to be picked up the next morning because he hadn't retrieved it.

He just couldn't stomach food if he tried, though.

The third visit happened when the clock struck two. The sky surveying the Salacia realm was dark, the moon was almost creating a spotlight onto his bed.

"George." A stifled voice came through the other side of his door. "You gotta eat something, man."

A piece of him wondered why Quackity wasn't his first visit. George figured, given their history and how Quackity had been guarding him since childhood, that he, too, was going through similar motions.

George, still not having anything to say, but a lot more mentally free to move, swung his legs over the edge of his bed. His eyes narrowed on his door; he could hear the floorboards shifting under Quackity's weight.

"And if not to eat, then..." He trailed off and it pained George to hear the softness his tone rarely possessed. "...to talk to me? Can you talk to me?"

George's eyelids flapped shut as he hung his head slightly, his hands gripping the mattress underneath him.

"It's just me, George." Quackity sighed, exasperated.

George drew in a deep breath before standing up from his bed, making his way towards the door before his hand hesitantly reached for the doorknob.

He calculated how it would go if he were to open that door for the first time in twelve hours. And

then he withdrew his hand; sitting down on the ground instead, out of defeat.

He leaned his back into the door, hugging his knees to his chest before resting his temple against his knee.

After a few moments, he heard shuffling noises on the other end; the sound of someone resting their head against the door was heard.

And no words were said as they sat in silence, back to back with a door in between them. One that almost felt invisible as they felt each other's presence so close by.

Quackity was the first to break the silence, his words ringing out in George's head until the sun rose.

"I miss her, too."

The sun rising up in the horizon bathed Salacia in a beautiful light; the statue centred in the water fountain of the courtyard almost glistening under the rays.

George arose to the sound of twisting locks from the glass doors leading to his balcony.

He rose from the ground; the fact that he had fallen asleep at his bedroom door was merely acknowledged when a mop of chestnut brown hair belonging to the Prince of Terra peeked through the ajar door ahead.

"What the *fuck*, Karl?" George had meant to sound a lot more astonished, but his voice was still enclosed in sleep.

"Hey, handsome." Karl sent him a sheepish smile, fixing the flower crown around his head as he slipped inside the room, closing the door behind him.

"No." George immediately said, straightening his posture from where he stood.

Karl lightly threw his hands up, the sleeves of his dark green sweatshirt sliding down his forearms as he did so. "George—"

George pointed to the glass doors. "Get out—"

"I have drugs." Karl concluded, earning a small sigh from the brunet whose eyes softened on him. "And a *lot* of love to give for someone who clearly needs it right now." That statement had caused a small twitch at the corner of George's lips.

He hadn't even realized he could display that sort of emotion, given the circumstances.

Karl was a fantastic alchemist; it showed itself in the products he'd fabricate and pass onto George.

Admittedly, it was more so the drugs than the remedies George was testing out.

Which is why upon hearing "*I have drugs*", George wasted no time in allowing Karl to be the first person to step foot in his room since having locked himself in isolation.

George sat on the stool of his white and golden grand piano, his cheek pressed against the frame as he stared back at Karl; the laxness of his smile deriving from the puffs of the joint he'd taken.

Karl giggled, the smile on his friend's face speaking for him. "Good, right?"

George was positive these drugs hit so fucking good that even if someone were stabbed with the sharpest of swords, a single hand-rolled joint could rid them of all their pain: physical and emotional.

"I forgot you could get in here with your stupid earthly-like powers, you freak." George jokingly said.

"You, pal," Karl began, pointing a playful finger. "Are also a freak. With your...*water-like* powers." He mimicked his English accent, progressing the curve at the corner of George's lips.

Though he loved his friends an equal amount, the energy he felt around Karl was a lot more...*relaxed*.

He felt as if he could be *entirely* himself. Not that he'd have to hide parts of himself to the others, but more so that he could be careless without having to face the reverberations of Quackity's and Niki's scolding.

They would worry about him a little *too* much, sometimes. He appreciated it, but it could get a tad bit suffocating.

"Still." Karl chuckled inwardly as he took a small drag from the joint. "Your warriors were a bit...unsettled."

"I mean." George lifted his head from his bicep as he leaned his elbows onto his parted knees, peering down at Karl who sat on his carpet. "You can't just go around making the ground burst from underneath you to sneak into the room of the prince."

"Soon to be the room of the...king..." Karl trailed off, hesitantly narrowing his lowered gaze onto George.

George rolled his eyes, meekly turning in his seat as he gave half of his back to Karl. "Don't remind me of that shit right now."

"It *is* tomorrow."

George's eyes fluttered shut, the piano keys which they were previously directed to, disappearing behind his eyelids, "Not making me feel any better."

"Wasn't trying to." Karl lightly sing-sung, regaining George's eyes on him, accompanied by a glare. "*Dude*." He reached over, wrapping his fingers around the brunet's clothed knee before giving it a small squeeze. "The coronation won't even take that long. Just get it over with."

Get it over with, George nearly laughed at that. *The event of the coronation itself wasn't the issue*, George's finger mindlessly slid against a key, the emitted sound wobbling through his intoxicated hearing, *it was everything that would happen thereafter*.

The wars he wanted nothing to do with, the training he most definitely did not want to attend, the exhausting responsibilities he witnessed his own mother having to deal with; meetings, plans, and anything and everything that catered to an entire *realm* of people.

So naturally, when the day of the coronation came, George showed up battered out of his mind.

"You need to sober up a *little*, George," Quackity told him when he straightened George's posture.

And it wasn't only because he had to pass as sober to the Kingdom as they watched him receive his

crown, but more so that his father wouldn't notice the way his eyes were barely opened or how his breath reeked of alcohol.

Fathers *had* to accompany their sons to the throne, that was the tradition, but George wished it could be his friends instead.

Niki gripped George's jaw. "Open, darling." She said softly, though her actions had been initially rough.

George opened his mouth, his tongue naturally sticking out; Niki placed a leaf of a mint onto his tongue. The brunet hummed, mentally thanking her for the help.

And though Karl, Quackity, and Niki had tried their utmost best to linger back at the steps leading to the common house, exuding great effort to straighten George up for his coronation, Cole knew his son was high the moment he peered down into his eyes.

"You have *got* to be kidding me," Cole said before steering his glare from his son to the three friends that stood as if they were the culprits.

One of them kind of was; Karl sent over a timid smile accompanied by a small wave before the three of them rushed inside, past the big wooden doors, to avoid Cole's reprimands for the state his son was in.

Battered out of his mind, George sat on the throne, sensing the hundred sum pairs of eyes on him as the Archbishop chanted the formalities.

This entire process had him wanting to jump off the nearest cliff, but if there was one good thing to come out of this kingship, it was the *crown*; George's eyes waved over the object that nearly glistened on the red pillow supported by hands he was *not* acknowledging.

George loved pretty things. And the detailing, as well as the imperceptible, yet effective crystal of Salacia, in the center of the crown, had him in brief awe.

But as the Archbishop lowered the crown onto his head, people clapping and cheering for his upcoming reign, George continued to stare blankly ahead.

And he held a likely reaction when being pictured for his portrait to replace his mother's, right in between King of Vulcan's and Queen of Eurus'.

And as he, Quackity, Karl, and Niki looked up at his hung portrait, George noticed how, out of the four rulers of the Elemental Kingdom, he was the only one *not* smiling.

Not a trace of pride as he sported the crown and royal mantle that displayed his ruling over the realm of Salacia.

"Is it just me or," Quackity broke the silence after a while. "The air is urging us to..." He reached over and squeezed George's shoulder. "...drink?"

None of them protested.

George was expected to stay until the end of the dinner following the coronation, but Quackity had spoken on his behalf stating that George wasn't feeling well.

No one questioned it. And though it had gained some quizzical looks, could anyone really speak on it?

They better of fucking not have, George thought to himself as he followed behind his friends on their way out of the common house, *given the fact that they barely allowed him time to mourn his mother's passing.*



Salacia Realm, along with the other three realms comprising the Kingdom, was just a portal away from the village.

This made it easy for Karl and Quackity to transport George back to his room when he was so intoxicated, the feeling of his legs became unknown to him.

Karl giggled drunkenly, his shoulder colliding against the soapstone of the portal as George nearly slipped out of his hold. “*George*, for the love of *God*.”

George mumbled something incoherent, his arms indolently slung over Karl's shoulder.

Quackity, who was meant to be holding up George's other half, drunkenly pushed past Niki and ran towards the statue of Salacia. “Salacia, my beloved!”

“I am so cold.” Niki shuddered as she brushed her hands up and down her arms to generate warmth. “No offence, but this has *got* to be the worst biome, temperature-wise.”

When in Salacia, home of the Waterborn, it was a steady and crisp temperature of ten to fifteen degrees celsius. Never going above, never going below.

“I love this realm like my own, but I have to agree with you on—*George*.” Karl hoisted George up when he, once again, began slipping out of his hold. “Quackity, she's made of stone.” He said through a small laugh when referring to the statue Quackity's eyes drunkenly marvelled at. “She cannot hear you. Now get *over* here. I can't hold him up like I used to.”

The two friends lifted George up once more, the ends of his boots scraping at the gravel as they half-dragged and half-carried him towards the entrance.

“I have to pee. I can't—I can't.” Niki rushed, the copious amounts of alcohol they consumed at the village bar having finally gotten to her bladder.

The sound of her heels clicking against the marbled flooring before they sounded up the large staircase, which led to the rooms upstairs, could have most definitely woken up the warriors and the rest of the palace's occupants.

George wasn't sure when he blacked out, but he was brought back to reality when Karl spoke. And his heart twitched in its rhythm when he noticed his father's face through his hazy gaze.

“Cole.” Karl stumbled back in his step before he steadied himself, sticking his hand out to initiate a handshake. “Good evening.”

“It is half-past one, your highness.” Cole kept his arms crossed over his chest causing Karl to pocket the tended hand. “Alex.” He averted his glare to the guard. “Would you like to inform me why my son is incapacitated?”

Quackity fixed George up, “What? He's *fine*...” He glanced down at the brunet whose head only rolled back onto his shoulder. “...He's, uh,” He cleared his throat and glanced at Cole with regretful eyes. “He's just undergoing the mourning process, Cole—”

“We all are.” Cole’s voice was stern, rid of any humour; humour he usually held around George’s friends.

That caused the splinter in George’s heart to expand slightly.

Sorry, father. George wanted to say, but he couldn’t get the words out; the traces of alcohol intermingling with the herbs Karl had alchemized vexed his state of consciousness.

The frown and genuineness behind Karl’s remorse were clear when he uttered a quiet. “Sorry, Cole.”

Candid enough for Cole to step aside reluctantly, speaking through a worked sigh. “Just bring him to his room, will you?”

“Yes, sir.” The two men chorused.

The next thing George felt was his mattress and covers engulfing his body, elevating his mind and soul to a whole new level of Nirvana.

Karl threw the covers over him, reaching for George’s hands to liberate him of his rings, finger by finger.

“How is he feeling?” Niki inquired upon returning from the bathroom, slightly out of breath.

“See for yourself,” Quackity mumbled, laughing through a hum.

A silence followed; George could only *imagine* how inebriated he must’ve looked in their eyes. The three friends burst into a conjoined laugh, George’s sluggish smile widened at the harmonious sound that rang through his drug-induced state.

“All off—oh, wait.” Karl chuckled before reaching over his head. “One more thing.” George felt a gradual weight off his head. “Can’t sleep with that on.”

The sound of his crown taking place onto his bedside table clanked through his room.

“You guys want me to walk you back to your realms?” Quackity asked after a while.

“Mm.” George’s brows furrowed as he flailed his arm out in front of him, accidentally hitting Karl’s chest.

“What’s up, handsome?” Karl interlocked his fingers with George’s own before resting their interlocked hands onto his chest.

“Stay.” George said through a barely audible whisper. “All...of you.”

Another silence passed them; George didn’t have to open his eyes to know they were all looking at each other, silently considering the suggestion.

“I mean, I don’t really *want* to go back home.” Niki’s voice sounded through his head, soothing him as it always did. “And it could be like old times. I’ve missed these intoxicated sleepovers.”

“I have no reason to stay here. My room is *literally* a door away.” Quackity’s footsteps began distancing themselves from George’s range.

“Stay, Quack—ity.” George hiccuped, eyes still closed as the corner of his lips tugged up. “That’s...that’s an order.”

Niki and Quackity shared a faint laugh as Karl sucked the air in between his teeth. “*Ooh. You gotta now.*”

“Fine. But I am *not* sleeping at the edge. Or beside Karl—”

“What the hell, dude—”

“You fucking *kicked* me off last time.”

“I fall off cliffs in my dreams sometimes, man. You know I can’t control that.”

“I’ll take the edge—*God.*” Niki sighed through a small laugh.

“Karl and I are sandwich-ing you, George.”

Karl and Quackity settled in bed; jacketing George’s sides in a soothing warmth, their cologne mixed in the crisp air that rested around them.

And as he laid in between his friends, George wondered how he would face his father in the morning.

And how he would go to sleep knowing he's got an entire realm under his ruling.

And how, as a delinquent who absolutely despises anything to do with war, would go the rest of his life catering to the Salacia realm.

Until he didn't think anymore.

Feeling Karl's arm draped over his chest and Quackity's mop of hair sheathing the crook of his neck, George welcomed sleep wholly; assured, in the most paradoxical sense.



George rose with the sun; Karl and Quackity sleeping soundlessly next to him was the first thing his eyes settled on. He smiled endearingly down at Quackity, *still wearing that damn black wired headband.*

The absence of Niki had George carefully exiting his bed in search of her.

It was still too early for him to run into the workers or warriors residing at the palace, so he made sure to shut the door to his room as quietly as possible.

Jogging down the large marbled steps, George felt his brain bouncing up and down in his head. He let out a quiet huff, rubbing his temples before reaching for the door handle which led to the outside of the palace.

“Hey, you.” George quietly said when he stepped out onto the front porch surrounding the main entrance of the palace.

Niki’s bleached blonde hair swept the air with the turn of her head when she looked up at George from where she sat. “What are you doing up?”

George cocked his eyebrow, a faint smile forming on his lips as he walked over to her. “Could ask you the same thing.” He took a seat on the steps, beside her, not a centimetre of space between them.

“Wanted to get home before my mother sends her guards out to fetch me,” There was a hint of annoyance clear in her tone, yet she still spoke softly.

George had known her long enough to read in between her niceness.

So, instead of speaking on how much they both didn’t entirely love Queen of Eurus, George fixed his gaze on the statue of Salacia, which stood tall in the middle of the courtyard ahead.

“How are you feeling?” Niki asked, breaking the calming silence.

George sighed. “Like dogshit.”

Earning a soft laugh from Niki caused a congruent sound from the brunet. “I more so meant with everything that’s happening.”

George caught her lingering gaze; she smiled softly up at him and he playfully rolled his eyes. “The same. About all of it, Niki.”

Niki concurred, breaking their gaze as they returned their eyes onto the statue. “She’d be proud of you, you know?”

“I haven’t even done anything yet.” George scoffed lightly, his eyes deflecting to his lap. “And I already have a feeling I’m going to fuck it all up.”

Niki shook her head before resting it on his shoulder. “You won’t—”

“You don’t know that—”

“I do.” Niki assured, searching for his eyes, her brows relaxing upon receiving his attention. “Because she had a good system going. All you have to do is carry out her plan.”

George wanted to be reassured, but he had also not fought a day in his life. His hands were soft—ignorant to the roughness fighting demanded—unlike his parents’, who’d been on the battlefield and trained for months prior.

“And when we go to war?” George lifted an eyebrow, a subtle scowl resting on his lips.

“We fight.” Niki confidently said; that familiar glint of fierceness displaying itself in the glare of her eyes.

Niki was soft-spoken, sweet, and understanding; a human embodiment of a green flag. But she was still a warrior, brought up by a woman whose emotional capacity was almost microscopic. So, on the battlefield, provoked or not, Niki *fought* with all her might.

It was a duality that never failed to amaze George.

“You’re not alone in this kingship, darling.” Niki continued, reaching for his hand before giving it a small squeeze. “You’ve got me, Quackity, and Karl right by your side. We will not fail you.”

George’s shoulders relaxed with his sigh. “I know.” He drew in his bottom lip, his eyes scanning over her warm features. “I know—thank you.” He gently spoke before pulling her into a tight embrace.

Before Niki had left for her realm, she turned around to face George. “I know you aren’t too keen, but,” Her eyes flickered up to his wayward hair, passing her hand through his fringe before setting her eyes back onto him. “You looked *magnificent* in your crown yesterday, Your Majesty.”

George inwardly groaned. “Don’t *ever* call me that again.”

They would always pick fun at the formalities. Being friends for so long and addressing each other as “*Your Majesty*” or “*Your Highness*” felt too formal. *Heartless, even.* George hated it.

In fact, he was the one who urged them to seize all formalities around each other.

Though it was colder than usual on mornings in Salacia, George had decided to stay awhile on the steps.

He had entered a train of thoughts about how the next few years of his life were to turn out and he wished he wasn’t sober when formulating the scenarios that began to escape his control.

George was somewhat thankful when the door behind him creaked open to reveal Quackity, sporting his suit from last night’s event; his suit jacket having been replaced by his puffer jacket which had the water emblem stitched on the back.

George wondered how he, himself, would look wearing said puffer jacket over techwear pants when he was to train; now that it was something he was expected to do.

He never did like the armour for training; all colourless and monotone.

“Fuck you doing out here?” Quackity rasped, tone still laced in sleep as he took a seat next to him.

“Mourning,” George muttered, eyes dancing at the gravel on the ground ahead.

“At least you managed to get some sleep.” Quackity had been warily looking at him, George lightly rolled his eyes when he caught his look. “Where’s Niki, by the way?”

“Wanted to get home before Queen Victoria does her head in,” George said, his last word falling through a light laugh when Quackity scoffed in concurrence.

“God.” Quackity pocketed his hands, a small shiver coursing down his spine as he winced slightly. “Niki’s mother is actually borderline psychotic.”

“I’m glad she didn’t come here to get her.” George’s eyes momentarily widened at his next formulated thought. “I could *not* deal with her voice in the state I’m in right now.”

Quackity scoffed. “I don’t think any of us could deal with her voice. Period.”

A small silence passed them; in some ways, it was comfortable, but there was an underlying image of two boys evading the topic of the funeral.

But neither of them addressed it because they weren’t big on heartfelt talks; being in each other’s presence was enough for them to feel understood and heard by the other.

George wasn’t sure if it was the cold or the nutrition his body was in deep need of, but the pulsing pain throbbing in his head worsened; reprimanding him for the sins committed last night.

“I am going to hang myself,” George grumbled, earning an airy laugh from Quackity.

As if on cue, the door behind them swung open, revealing Karl; a blanket wrapped around his olive-green suit from last night: the tie had been ditched, laying astray on George’s bedroom floor. As well as the flower crown, which was probably sitting next to George’s crown on his bedside table.

“Karl, thank god you’re here.” Quackity exaggerated through an exhale. “It’s not even eight in the morning and George is already having suicidal thoughts.”

Karl grunted as he joined George’s right side, taking a seat; his body aligning with his friends’. “Yeah, uh, any chance you could postpone those? I have a raging headache.”

“Hence my ‘*suicidal thoughts*,” George shot a sly glare at Quackity, who offered him a skittish smile in return.

“Oh, well, in that case. I’m right there with you.” Karl put his hand out, George noticed that he was still sporting his rings from last night.

George lazily put his hand in his, Karl wasted no time in interlacing their fingers; something they did so instinctively and often so that Quackity never batted an eyelid at the gesture.

“Your nail polish is chipping,” Karl noted as he turned their interlocked hands, scrutinizing the black nail polish.

George playfully rolled his eyes. “Thank you for the kind reminder, Karl.”

“Good morning!” A bright voice caused them to turn around in their seats, meeting eyes with Ana. “How are we feeling about some toasty, cheesy bread and—”

Quackity gagged at the same time that George and Karl turned their faces away, a similar muffled noise emitting them. “I’m gonna stop you right there, my beloved, *beloved*, Ana. We had a big night last night—if we have even a tad bit of cheese in our system, it’s gonna come right back out —”

“*Oh—*”

“—Coffee?” Quackity suggested with a grin.

Ana crossed her arms over her chest, a warm smile occupying her lips. “With the marshmallows?”

Quackity gasped; George and Karl finally recovered from their momentary hell as they glanced over at their friend, amused at his child-like behaviour that seemed to unapologetically come out around Ana.

“I will take that as a ‘yes’.” Ana laughed before looking over at Karl and George. “And for the princes—or, *king* and prince, shall I say?”

“You shall *not*, Ana. For fuck’s sake.” George groaned as he hid his face in Karl’s shoulder.

“Coffee sounds great, Ana,” Karl spoke on their behalf.

“I will get right on—” Before she could finish her sentence, her shoulder bumped into that of Cole’s, who peeked into the doorway, eyes washing over his three delinquents, “—on that...” She veered her eyes from Cole to look at the boys knowingly.

Because admittedly, they were all in for a good scolding.

Or at least, that’s what they thought. But Cole offered them a defeated sigh, which fell into a smile; mostly directed to George when he took sight of his tired son.

Ana disappeared back into the palace, closing the door behind her as she left Cole and the three boys out on the porch.

“Colbert!” Quackity jeered, using the nickname he always did to purposely annoy Cole, though it only derived a half-endearing, half-annoyed smile from the elder. “I see you are in a *much* better mood this morning.”

“Alex.” Cole gave him a curt nod. “I see you are finally doing your job of keeping my son alive and well.” He shot a small glare George’s way, earning the brunet’s instant apology through his docile brown eyes.

Cole opened his arms and George wasted no time in standing from the steps to walk into his father’s arms. Shortly after pulling away, Quackity and Karl had gotten up to reach them.

“Are you still mad?” Karl asked quietly as he wavered his eyes onto Cole.

Cole chuckled, dropping his arms from George’s frame before tending them towards the chestnut-coloured-haired boy. “No, Karl. I am not.”

Karl broke into a grin before wrapping his arms around Cole; George smiled softly at their engagement.

There was so much he hated about the Elemental Kingdom, but one good thing was the way the four realms could intermingle to create beautiful relationships. The comfort he received from watching his friends being so welcomed and loved by his parents was one of the only things keeping George alive.

“I’ve upgraded back to the first-name basis!” Karl silently cheered as he pulled away from the hug. “Let’s go.”

“Well,” Quackity glanced over at Karl. “The good thing about being a non-royal is that I don’t have a title to revert to.”

Karl squinted his eyes, teeth gritted in a grimace. “*Yeah...* but he says your name with so much spite all the time, you know?”

That had chased a small chuckle from George and Cole as the four of them made their way back inside the palace.

“Yeah, listen, we gotta talk about that, Colbert.” Quackity began a back and forth with Cole, one that George and Karl always found amusing. “Because that shit kind of hurts my feelings.”



His wrapped fist collided against the leather of the punching bag so hard it had coursed a grunt from his brother who had his hands on either side of the bag, holding it in place for him; the chain holding it up emitting a chime when the fighter retrieved his step.

“Are you wanting to break your knuckles again?” The blonde-haired boy, a few inches shorter than the one he faced, let out a small, nervous chuckle.

Dream finally transposed his fixed glare from the body bag to Punz. “*What?*” He asked, mind fuzzy and laboured breaths coming out in a susurrations.

Punz half-smiled, readjusting the punching bag that begged to sway in his hands from Dream’s forceful punch. “You’re hitting a little harder than usual, is all.”

Dream let out a deep huff, veering his eyes back to the bag. “M’fine.” He mumbled through a

breath before nodding his chin at the body bag. "Let's go again."

"We should probably take a break." Punz dared to say, despite the hesitation in his tone when he caught Dream's mild scowl. "There is blood quite literally seeping through your hand wraps, brother." He briefly glanced down at the light crimson stains in the fabric.

"I am very aware." Dream said, seemingly unfazed before returning his eyes to the bag, getting into his fighting stance. "And I said go again."

Before Punz could reluctantly abide, the door to the training room inside the Vulcan palace swung open. Without having to turn around, the assumed presence drew an annoyed sigh from Dream who dropped his fists back to his sides.

"Son?" The measured, low tone spoke from behind Dream.

Dream kept his eyes on the ground, head slightly hung as he awaited Punz to answer their father.

"Would you leave me and Clay for a moment?" He asked, though his requests always seem to sound off as a demand.

Dream didn't fail to notice the slight eye-roll from Punz as the younger's hand slipped from the body bag. "Of course, father." He mildly sighed, tone indifferent as if he wasn't fazed on being asked to vacate the area for a conversation between the two men before him.

Punz's footsteps echoed through the training room before they stopped. "Thank you, Luke." King of Vulcan laid a firm grip onto Punz's shoulder. "I'll meet you in the dining room for breakfast."

Dream brought his fists back up, continuing his attacks on the bag as if the man behind him wasn't awaiting his attention.

And maybe Dream was being a little petty, the way he'd always get when reminded of the difference in which his father addressed him in comparison to Punz.

"Your punches are falling a bit flat." King Sebastian criticized, seizing Dream's punch against the body bag. "You should put more weight onto your right leg."

Fucking prick. Dream thought as a bitter smile formed on his face before he dropped his fists to his sides, his back still to his father. "Did you need me for something, sir?" He undid the wraps around his hand, turning halfway so he could face the bench to his right.

"I am going away in a couple of weeks." Sebastian started. "I would like you to guide the training sessions for the days that I will not be here."

Dream nodded in response, though the way his father had worded the request itched him to ask for reinstatement. One that could be spoken with the soft and docile tone he used with Punz when asking *him* for things.

Although, Dream couldn't quite recall the last time he'd heard his father request something from Punz.

As Dream tossed the abused and bloody hand wraps onto the wooden bench, a light scoff emitted past Sebastian's lips. "Why are you discarding your wraps?"

Dream narrowed his eyes on the bench before speaking through the baring of his teeth. "I am done practicing." *Jackass*, he wanted to add.

"I'd say you could use more practice." Sebastian's tone was laced with dirt, not a fraction stranding from the abundance of criticism he always seemed to have when it came to Dream.

Dream hummed a curt, bitter chuckle. "Perhaps when my knuckles are no longer bleeding." He finally looked over at him; an impassive glare flashed across their faces the moment they met eyes.

Dream wasn't sure why he had admitted to that; sort of insinuating that the blood was stopping him from continuing as if he hadn't just shut Punz down moments before for when the younger had urged him to stop for the exact reason.

Maybe it was compassion he searched for, Dream narrowed his eyes on his father's. But he knew he wasn't going to receive that from the man that stared back at him as though Dream wasn't one of his.

No care for the drip of blood that Dream sensed coursing through his knuckle down to the webs of his hand.

"I used to fight until I could no longer feel the nerves in my hands." Sebastian tilted his chin up slightly, seeming proud of his statement.

Dream ground his jaw as he fought to keep his eyes on him. "Well." He cleared his throat, almost mentally checking out when the words slipped past his lips, "We can't all be as remarkable as you, sir."

There was a sinister upturn in the corner of Sebastian's lips as he grounded his gaze onto his son. "You are still one of me. You can't be as remarkable as me, but you should aspire to be." The upturn progressed when Dream blinked back at him. "And backing down due to some measly blood isn't the way to go about that."

Dream only stared back blankly, though his mind was screaming at him to put his father in his place.

"Anyway," Sebastian sighed, doing a once-over of the training room before staring down at his son. "That is all I came here for. I shall see you at breakfast."

Dream wanted nothing more than to see him out of his sight, but a memory sparked his mind.

He hated having to even await his approval to execute his predetermined thought, but there he was, tottering on his feet as he pushed himself to get the words out; the window in which he could ask slowly closing in the closer his father approached the door to the exit.

"Actually," He began and immediately regretted it when his father seized in his steps, reluctantly turning around to face him. "I was wondering if I could pass...on breakfast."

Sebastian wrapped his fingers around the handle of the blade poking out of his holster. Dream had then noticed that the reason his holster was visible was due to the fact that he, for once, was not sporting his royal mantle.

"Why would that be?" Sebastian calmly asked.

As calm as the calm before the storm.

"I would like to visit the King of Salacia." Dream stated quietly, eyes scanning the floor briefly before looking back up at his father.

Sebastian's brows imperceptibly furrowed on his son's countenance. "Why would you need to do that?"

It was Dream's turn to feel confusion rise within him. "Queen Anthea passed, sir."

"Yes. Hence yesterday's funeral and the coronation." Sebastian asked, annoyance and impatience creeping in his tone.

Dream grew just as impatient and annoyed; *why does he need a goddamn reason then?*

"So, I would like to show my respects. Present my condolences. I did not get a chance at the funeral, nor at the coronation. The king left early." Dream reasoned, despite the way it pained him to explain something that was self-explanatory.

"And?" Sebastian asked, thinning the line on which Dream balanced atop the pit of anger beneath him.

"*And*, she was an excellent warrior. We fought by her side in battle. We were *there* when she took her last breath." Dream spoke through slightly gritted teeth. "She would want us to check in on her son, sir."

Dream and Queen Anthea weren't extremely personal with each other, but she was a remarkable human being.

Dream didn't have to spend every day with her in order to know that; he saw it in the way she immediately brought light into the rooms she walked in, the way smiles seemed a little brighter at the sound of her voice.

And though last night's coronation, as well as the funeral, was the last time Dream had seen her son since having briefly noticed him at a young age, Dream felt as though he needed to pay his respects.

And maybe a part of it lied within the fact that he, too, had lost his mother. That he, too, understood the pain Queen Anthea's son was currently suffering.

"And I ask again," Sebastian straightened his posture, eyes still looking down on his son; Dream felt that even if his father wasn't standing on the platform before the steps, he would still be *looking down* at him. "Why you feel as though *you*, specifically, need to go out of your way to present your condolences. I'm sure he's heard enough of those."

Dream inhaled sharply. "Yes, but...I also know what it feels like to lose an exceptional mother."

Sebastian laughed at that. Not loud, but audible enough to make Dream's blood boil.

"You know what it feels like to have lost a maternal figure in your life. But your mother wasn't exceptional like Queen Anthea. She was a mere housewife, Clay."

And it took everything in Dream to not lurch himself at his father, wrapping his hands around his neck to execute all the repressed anger from the moment he had entered the room.

But all he could do, after years of suffering through his orders and never having the guts to really do anything about it, was stand still; the ball of his jawbone accentuated itself through his skin, the blood from his peeled knuckles dripping once more, covering the previously dried streak.

"But." Sebastian continued through a calm and reposed tone as if mindlessly berating his deceased

wife did no damage to his soul. “Do whatever you desire. Just make sure you are taking care of practice during my leave.” He sighed as he turned on his heel, walking towards the exit once more.

As if his reposed tone caused Dream to tumble onto the thin line holding him up from succumbing to his impulsive rage, he found himself saying, “Mother *was* exceptional. *You* just failed to notice that.”

Dream braced himself when he noticed the small tense in his father’s shoulders before they relaxed; he could almost imagine the sardonic smile that etched across his father’s lips before the man swung the door open; the heels of his boots distancing themselves from where Dream stood.

And not feeling satisfied with his defence on his mother’s name, Dream vastly turned around to face the punching bag, landing a rageful fist against the leather that his eyes saw as the man who had just chided the only sense of peace this palace had ever known.

Dream hissed as he watched the blood smear across his knuckles before he looked up at the bag, eyes still red with anger which then diluted into sadness as a sweet, porcelain-skinned woman appeared through a memory.

Defeated, Dream stumbled forward, his arms indolently wrapping around the punching bag as he rested his forehead against the leather.

Dream would never openly admit it, he simply couldn’t, *but his father was the bane of his fucking existence.*

“You tryna make out with that thing?” A familiar voice joked from behind him moments later.

A smile Dream wasn’t sure he could quite muster in the state he was in appeared on his face as he waited till the door shut behind his best friend before letting go of the bag.

“There *are* other ways to exalt your libido, bro.” Sapnap continued through an audibly amused smile.

Turning around, he was faced with Sapnap; the shorter sported his techwear pants, a black puffer jacket over his dark red shirt. His sword was already strapped in, Dream sort of admired how he rarely left his room without that thing strapped to his thigh by his holster.

“Yeah?” Dream’s eyebrows shot up at him. “You offering?”

Sapnap firstly cringed before giggling quietly. “Shut your mouth.”

Dream laughed lightly, thankful that Sapnap had shown himself because he felt as if he was on the brink of breaking the next thing he set his eyes on.

“King Sebastian said you’re not attending breakfast,” Sapnap said as he awaited Dream to reach him.

“You know you don’t have to refer to him as ‘*King Sebastian*’, right?” Dream said as he reached his side, placing a light hand on his shoulder. “Just call him my father. As my *confidant*—” Sapnap broke into a smile, hanging his head slightly before looking at Dream through a lowered gaze. “—you’ve earned that.”

“Yeah, but...” Sapnap shrugged, Dream’s hand slipped from his shoulder. “Kinda weird to do that when his own son addresses him as ‘*sir*’.”

Dream stilled in his position before feigning a smile. "Yeah, well." He cleared his throat and allowed his eyes to wave on the ground, "But, yeah." He looked at Sapnap once more, "I am not attending breakfast."

On their way out of the training room, Sapnap asked. "Why?"

"I want to pay a visit to the King of Salacia." Dream said for the second time that day, almost growing tired of having to state his plans.

Sapnap blew a breath. "I hate going to the Salacia realm, bro."

Dream had changed out of his sweat-drenched training attire to sport an outfit matching Sapnap's, differentiating in the shirt as Dream wore all black.

Also differentiating in the placements of their swords, Dream always kept his slotted at the back of his belt-like harness.

The soles of his boots scraped against the gravel before the large staircase as he looked up at the palace that differed from his own in terms of colour and structure.

He *had* been here before, but maybe a total of five times in his entire life.

He never really enjoyed coming through the portal to Salacia because of the drastic change in temperature from the comforting twenty-five to, sometimes, thirty degrees celsius that warmed the Vulcan realm.

He was already shivering a little and his guard, who lingered behind him, made sure to point out what he was thinking.

"I feel like we just entered a god damn morgue," Sapnap spoke through a slight chatter of his teeth.

Dream bit back a smile as he looked over his shoulder. "Sapnap."

"Can we, just," Sapnap rolled his shoulders with a slight grimace etched across his face. "Hurry this up?"

Dream gave him a curt nod. He went to take a step towards the staircase, but a soft, honey-like voice seeped into their range.

Queen Victoria's daughter, Dream noted as he took in the sight of her; sporting a white bodysuit tucked into her skirt, knee-high boots with her holster holding her daggers.

Flicking her hair over her shoulder and cocking her head to the side, Niki put her hand out, "Prince of Vulcan." She greeted him with a welcoming smile.

"Princess Niki," Dream smiled in return, taking her hand in his before bringing it to his lips to press a soft kiss atop her hand.

Niki's smile beamed as Dream slowly let go of her hand. "May I ask what, or who, you are looking for? I can deliver a message..." She trailed off, waiting for him to jump in.

Dream's brows shot up slightly as he crossed his hands behind his back, offering her a small nod. "Yes, actually. Could I speak with the king?"

"George?" Niki said, almost as if she was mentally checking in with herself.

George. Dream's smile was gradual. *That's what it was.*

"I'll, uh," Niki juttet her thumb to the door. "I'll see if he is awake."

Why wouldn't he be? Dream wanted to ask, his brows momentarily knitted, *it was nearly ten in the morning.*

Dream wasn't going to lie; waiting more than five minutes in this nearly unbearable cold had him a tad bit annoyed, but when the door swung open to reveal a familiar face, and one less so, he was slightly relieved.

"King of Salacia." Dream said through a breath.

Though his face held no expression, Dream swallowed lightly as he took him in, *he looked...pretty?*

George's brows knitted as he waited on him to speak, but Dream almost needed a bit more time to look at him because...*yeah, he was pretty.*

Pretty with soft, alabaster-like skin; faded pink tint in his lips and his fairly long lashes.

Though he stood a staircase length away from the king, Dream could almost see all of him. And, *cute*, he thought when his eyes landed on the crown.

Because it was broad daylight, no special events on sight, yet he was wearing it, which was surprising, seeing as less than twenty-fours ago, Dream remembered him looking empty when it was being placed onto his head.

And though this wasn't the first time he was seeing him, Dream felt entirely captivated.

"Is Your Majesty mute or something?" Sapnap spoke, breaking the silence that had taken over the four of them.

The king's guard took a step forward, hand resting on the handle of his blade. "*You* came into *our* realm."

"And?" Sapnap urged.

Dream would have chimed into the guards' back and forth were it not for the fact that he and the king had been holding eye contact that entire time.

For some reason, Dream simply couldn't pull himself out of it.

"I'm sorry?" His guard chuckled bitterly. "Is the bandana around your head cutting the circulation of your brain cells or are you actually this stupid?"

Sapnap took a step forward. "I fucking beg your pardon—"

"State your reasoning behind your visit or get lost." The opposing guard spat, taking another step forward.

"Quackity. Enough."

That's what he sounds like, a small breath escaped past Dream's lips with the relaxation of his shoulders as he straightened his posture.

“My apologies.” Dream cleared his throat as he briefly glanced at *Quackity* before looking back at George. “My visit, Your Majesty, is to express my deepest sympathies.” He watched the King of Salacia straighten his posture before him, expression still unreadable. “Queen of Salacia did *wonders* for this kingdom.”

A long silence passed them, Dream heard the relented sigh that dragged out from Sapnap who stood impatiently behind him.

“Is that it then?” The king replied, a quirk of an eyebrow furthering the way he seemed unaffected by the events unravelling before him; just as he looked when being crowned, and furthermore, at the funeral. “You’ve just come to express your condolences?”

Dream, slightly taken aback by the dull response, cleared his throat before blinking back. “Yeah—yes. And if you are in need of any help, my people are your people.”

The king seemed as if he was holding back...a laugh? Dream was so perplexed as he stood before someone that he, for the first time, had no idea how to reach out to. *He seemed so lifeless behind his eyes, yet not in an abashed manner, but rather...unaffected? Fearless?*

“Prince of Vulcan,” King of Salacia started, pocketing his hands into his slacks, “I was crowned king—much to my dismay—” He pressed on the interruptive statement, “But it means that if I were to want anything in this kingdom, it would be at my disposal. And that *your people*,” He fixed his eyes onto him, almost mockingly. “—have always been *my people*. Your father might be this *massive* tosser that’s got you thinking he owns everything, but *surely* you are not that dense to miss the fact that everyone in this kingdom is mutually at each other’s service.”

Dream’s lips were parted slightly as he stared back, unsure of what to say. He wasn’t intimidated, far from it, but more so intrigued.

Was it because of his obvious attraction to him or the fact that, again, he was unreadable?

“Now,” The king briefly looked over his head, “Thank you for your concern.” He mindlessly said while scanning his courtyard before reposing his eyes onto Dream. “But *please*, return to your realm.”

A quiet, punched-out breath escaped past Dream’s lips as they upturned into a light smirk; he watched as the brunet turned on his heel before he disappeared behind the heavy doors, his guard in tow.

The door was pretty much slammed in his face, yet Dream was still sporting a smirk, one that only grew with the seconds that elapsed around them.

Dream slowly turned on his heel, hand still clasped behind his back as his eyes danced on the gravel beneath him. He began entering a thought that was heavily occupied by the image of the king he was now properly acquainted with.

Sapnap narrowed his eyes onto him. “He just called your father a prick and you’re smiling?”

There was a small pull at the corner of Dream’s lips, his eyes remaining on the ground. “No one has ever spoken about my father like that before.”

Sapnap scoffed. “Yeah. Because they know they’ll get *cindered* if they do.”

“Exactly.” Dream finally brought his eyes to his friend, his smile widening slightly. “Makes him that much more interesting.”

Chapter End Notes

just the first chapter, so haven't got much to say!

named the fic Metanoia based on IAMX's albums for like overall vibes, tone, and
ambiance

[the fic playlist](#) - most chapters will be titled off a song from here that sets mood n shiii.

hope you guys stick around for a solid ride of dnf angst, fluff, and a generous amount
of smut.

as well as some cute bestie moments, you know i love that shit.

night/morning/evening/afternoon xx

Quiet the Mind

Chapter Summary

Neptunalia dawns on Salacia; Dream attempts a different approach, George just wants to drown out the fact that this festival was his mother's favourite.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



“What meaning is there in the tragic suffering of a man for whom everything is ultimately nothing and whose only law in this world is...” George recited, eyes scanning every inked word off the page of the used book that sat in his lap. *“...agony?”*

Karl lifted his eyes from George’s nails; ones he painted with attentiveness, *“Jeez. Way to set the mood for Neptunalia.”*

Quackity laughed from where he sat at the edge of the bed, adjusting his tie while keeping his eyes on his reflection of the mirror facing him. “You know who George sounds like right now?” He continued through a laugh, Karl emitted a similar noise as he waited in knowing anticipation. “An old man sat on his front porch, looking back on the mistakes he made in life.”

Niki knelt in front of Quackity, back to him as she motioned for his help with the clasps of her corset. “As much as I love you, darling, you’re really ruining the vibe with your Cioran quotes.” She briefly glanced at George, eyes softening on him when he playfully rolled his eyes at her.

In all honesty, George *was* ruining the mood for the festival. Especially when getting ready together was something the group looked forward to as much as they did the event itself.

A soft ballad sounded through George’s record player; swirling in with their light conversations as they dressed up for the realm’s annual festival: held in honour of Neptune, Salacia’s consort.

Each realm had its respective festivals; George really only attended Terra’s and Eurus’ because Karl and Niki would ask him too. As well as the fact that it gave them a good reason to get inexplicably inebriated.

Neptunalia should have had him completely sober as he handled preparations like lighting, music, and all things granted for a festival—but George was cross-faded; five glasses of wine were consumed and one joint was smoked.

So, naturally, Niki took control because party-planning was her forte, amongst other things. But she had also taken over because she understood that George would have to go through his mother’s planner to organize this event, which would only open up a fresh wound.

That morning, however, when the four friends were sat at the kitchen island discussing their outfits over breakfast; Cole mindlessly reminded them of the fact that Neptunalia was Queen Anthea’s most favourite day of the year.

Henceforth, George's binge drinking since the raw hour of ten A.M. The image of his mother's beaming features as she danced to her heart's content at past Neptunalia events was ripe in his mind, which urged him to drink enough wine to fill up her grave.

Through blurry eyes, George shifted his lethargic glare from his friends back to his adored book; re-reading over the section that he felt close to his heart.

"If you don't burn that book, I will." Quackity said before knocking his knuckles against the fastened clasps of Niki's corset, mumbling a barely audible, *'You're good'* causing her to stand up from the ground.

"Then you will burn me with it," George grumbled, side-eyeing Quackity.

"Let him indulge in his misanthropes, guys." Karl tapped George's other hand when the freshly painted fingernails of the other began its drying process. "If he finds comfort in nihilist authors, who are we to stop him?"

"Nihilism is just another word for suicidal, Karl." Quackity countered.

"That's exactly what an idiot would say," George mumbled, the two friends simultaneously rolling their eyes at the other.

"Alright." Niki flattened down her satin, black dress with her free hand; the slit that exposed the holster strapped at her thigh, excluding the dagger, was shielded by George's royal mantle, which she held up in the air. "Time to get this on, darling."

Shortly after applying the finishing touches to their outfits, the four of them stood in a half-circle, momentarily quiet as they took in each other's looks: Quackity in an outfit resembling the one he wore to the coronation, Niki in her sleek dress, Karl in his pastel blue suit, and George in all black, the only colour to his clothes being his cream skin exposed by the lace of his button-down.

"*God.*" Karl threw his arms around Niki and George, his fingertips grazing Quackity's clothed shoulder as he pulled them all into a tighter circle. "We're all *so fucking hot.*"



The moment George walked past the doors leading to the backcourt of the palace, he had not gotten a second to enjoy the carelessness and freedom the festival gifted: the booming dance floor, the liberating music, and the abundance of drinks.

Drinks that George desperately craved the more he kept being pulled to the side to be forcefully engaged in conversations regarding his mother.

"Queen Anthea did so much for this kingdom. She was a saviour—" *He wanted to rip his fucking ears out,* "She—"

"King George." A sharp voice spoke from behind the woman who he saw in doubles.

Looking over the twin shoulders, George was met with the Queen of Eurus' everlasting icy glare; *he had never been happier to see this woman than at that very moment.*

"Queen Victoria." George smiled softly, half-feigned, half-relieved. "I must go. Sorry." He gave a curt nod to the stranger before moving past her.

Queen Victoria walked with him down the steps leading to the acres of grassy land; peppered in

twinkling lights hanging from tree to tree, white, veiled tents shielding tired dancers as they drank from wine glasses.

George felt envious of them, craving not only the feeling of the wine glass stem against his fingers but the acidic taste of wine rolling down his tongue and sinking in his stomach in comforting warmth.

Though he had been thankful for the interruption in the conversation that drew him closer to his demise, George didn't quite know *what* to say to Queen Victoria. He never did. She was hard to read to determine how to assess a conversation. George was like that, too, but she was unbearable about it.

"Thank you for giving Niki a helping hand in the..." George waved the non-pocketed hand at the busy backcourt, not having the energy to formulate any more words and mentally hoping that she would pick up where he left off—the way she always did.

"Yes, well." Queen Victoria smiled, the red in her lips almost accentuating the malintent in her tone. "Anything for Anthea." She raised her nearly full wine glass, the red liquid swirling with the motion.

The absence of the royal title when she stated his mother's name crossed George. Someone like Queen of Terra could afford the first-name basis since the two women were close friends, but Queen Victoria didn't have friends and George's mother was certainly not one of them.

"Right." George forced a gentle tone before nodding his chin to the dance floor. "I'll be joining them now—"

"Are you still poorly?" She asked, bringing the rim of her glass to her curved lips before slowly taking a sip.

George half-turned, tilting his chin up slightly as he held himself back from just simply walking away. *If anyone was to bring up his absence at the dinner of the coronation, it would be her.*

"Pardon—"

Queen Victoria, cutting him off once again, spoke against the rim of her glass. "It's just that you left the coronation before dinner had started. Bit bizarre." She shrugged lightly, taking another sip before pulling the glass from her lips. "Given the circumstances."

George, having suddenly worn himself out from trying to pass as nice and agreeable, as well as the lack of drugs and alcohol pumping into his system to give him the strength to put up with her shit, let out a deep sigh. "Well, *Queen of Eurys*," He began, noticing her obscure, hard swallow. "Not even forty-eight hours before the coronation, my mother was being buried six feet under. Felt as if, *given the circumstances*, leaving early was far from bizarre."

"George!" Niki said through a laboured breath, her palms fisting a portion of her dress as she hoisted it up, lightly jogging up the steps in her heels. "You coming?" She narrowed her eyes on her mother before locking them onto George.

A silent, '*Let me get you out of here*', was transpired between the two friends.

"Yeah." George's eyes softened on her, not taking one last look at Queen Victoria before joining Niki on the steps.

Niki hooked her arm with his; George noticed that she had looked over her shoulder to her mother

who stood still on the platform of the steps.

“Forget it, Niki,” George mumbled in their proximity, giving her arm a small squeeze.

A quiet huff was heard from the platinum blonde before she guided them to the dance floor, joining Quackity and Karl who had beads of sweat peppering their foreheads; displaying the image of two men who had released their steam in dance moves.

Karl’s eyes widened the moment he spotted Niki and George amidst the sea of bodies; he threw two firm hands on George’s shoulder, pulling him in. And in a common occurrence with Karl, a surprising smile grew on George’s lips; though light and imperceptible, it was the most genuine he held that entire night.

“We need to get you *plastered!*” Karl spoke over the booming music, loud enough for Quackity and Niki to hear, which earned a laugh from them.

Karl’s suggestion raptured George’s soul as he threw his head back in contentment. “*Please.*”

George dismissed Quackity’s request to accompany him and Karl outside; quite frankly, the younger seemed to be having a good time on the dance floor and George didn’t always need him hovering over.

Karl was good at filling the silence; not in a way that seemed as if he was trying too hard. George was appreciative of that because he didn’t speak much.

Karl didn’t mind that; the occasional giggles and soft smiles from the brunet seemed to suffice.

“The, like, dark brown velour shirt I have?” A cloud of smoke puffed past his moving lips as he passed the blunt to George, who graciously took it from him. “You could wear that for Saturnalia —“

“Good evening.” A voice spoke from their right, drawing in their red-rimmed eyes. “Prince of Terra, King of Salacia.” The blonde bowed his head respectfully.

Prince of Vulcan, George nearly rolled his eyes at the sight of him. Only memories of his overzealous condolences from the day before surfaced at the sight of him, fuelling his indifference towards him.

Karl giggled, glimpsing over at George before looking at the blonde. “Your *Highness.*”

“Your guard looks a little different, Your Majesty.” The shorter of the two newcomers spoke, wearing an amused smile on his lips.

Moron. George took another drag of the blunt, the ends almost burning the side of his forefinger as he had not realized how fast they had smoked all of it.

“Ey, pal.” Karl threw his hands up. “I don’t know *what’s* going on between you and Alex, I just know he would *easily* take you in a fight.”

The guard’s amused smile fell in an instant, his ego had been visibly bruised. Karl leaned into George’s side as the brunet looked down, fighting a victorious smile as did Karl.

“Fuck did you say?” The guard spoke, almost through the baring of his teeth.

George wouldn’t have looked up were it not for the feeling of someone’s eyes on him. He side-

eyed first, trying his best to perceive the stare through his peripheral vision, but eventually gave up.

“Woah. *Woah.*” Karl’s voice sounded distant when George began zoning out the conversing pair.

Looking over, he caught the verdant irises studying him. George furrowed his eyebrows, almost mentally asking him what he wanted, but only received an end to the briefly held eye contact.

“Don’t shoot the messenger, you know what I’m saying?” Karl spoke through a giggle, his voice zoning back into George’s range.

George’s curt laugh sounded through a quiet snort; not because Karl was being his usual trolling self, but because his tone just told the brunet that the prince was fairly high.

“C’mon, man. I’m just teasing.” Karl chuckled lightly, earning nothing short of a glare from the guard. “Let me offer you a drink.” He motioned his hand to the palace.

The guard let out a bitter chuckle before turning his attention to the blonde prince. “You coming?”

Karl took that moment to lightly nudge George. “Let’s go?”

George pursed his lips, looking down at the finished blunt. “Not gonna lie, this barely did it for me.”

“Here.” Karl fished into the pocket of his pastel blue fitted slacks before he pulled out a rectangular tin. “I only rolled one more. You deserved it.”

George looked down at the tin box before glancing up at his friend with a light smile. The chestnut-haired boy giggled softly, slipping the tin box into George’s free hand.

“Save me a drink?” George asked as he briefly looked behind Karl to take notice of the guard who made his way up the steps to disappear behind the doors of the palace.

When their eyes rejoiced, Karl smirked lightly at him. “Only if you save me a dance.”

George scoffed before giving him a small nod. “Sure.”



Ever since their first interaction in the Salacia courtyard, Dream had been thinking about George. And though he was counting on seeing or speaking with him again, Dream’s confidence had suddenly vanished the moment the brunet’s friend left after Sapnap.

Dream wanted to blame it on the fact that he wasn’t good with one on one conversations; at least with people that he wasn’t familiar with. But he knew a big part of it was because the King of Salacia sort of made him nervous.

A majority of it was the brunet’s demeanour; constant impassive eyes and careless expression. And how the king had easily berated his father with no sense of remorse.

There was, however, a tiny part of him that was intimidated by George’s beauty; supple cream-like skin, soft pink-tinted lips, delicate lashes fanning over pupils swimming in a pool of dark chocolate.

And he was holding himself accountable for the fact that he had acquired all those details in the time that Prince Karl and Sapnap were conversing.

And he couldn't even allow himself to feel the guilt or embarrassment because George *was* pretty.

And Dream knew the brunet knew of his beauty, yet in the most humbling sense. Or maybe it was simply because of his indifference to everything.

"Is there a reason you're still standing out here?" The brunet finally spoke, rendering a short circuit in Dream's brain as he had not expected him to speak.

Dream's eyes were locked onto him whilst the brunet's eyes were merely scrutinizing the end of the blunt he was in the process of lighting.

Dream cleared his throat, straightening his posture as if to generate the confidence he always held around strangers. "I'm going to go in." He stated, his voice coming out a lot quieter than he had presumed. "I'm just..." He began losing the sense of his vocabulary as his eyes hesitantly danced on the alit end of the blunt before he sensed the king's eyes flicker up to him.

They held each other's gaze for a brief moment before the king spoke. "Avoiding someone?"

For having an answer already prepared since Dream was indeed avoiding someone, he was sure having a lot of trouble getting his words out; he supposed it was the way the dim lights surrounding the water fountain reflected onto the dark of the brunet's eyes; yet another thing that affected him in a way he didn't quite understand just yet.

And that fucking accent, "You could say that." Dream replied hoarsely, not wanting to wear his patience thin; although, George's gaze held no expectancy.

The king merely nodded, breaking their eye contact as his eyes derived to the blunt. Dream's deduction of the brunet's apathy was further reinforced when he noticed how he was smoking out in the open.

Especially since this was the first time he'd seen any sort of paraphernalia being used in the kingdom. He knew of them existing in the overworld, but the closest thing to attainable drugs in this kingdom was Terras' remedies and the alcohol in the bars and pubs.

Dream almost made his way inside, though he wanted nothing more than to steer clear of his father who awaited his arrival. But the king lightly tended the smoking blunt towards him, silently offering him to take a hit.

Were it not for the fact that he *had* to see his father, Dream would have almost taken it. And though he was far from being peer pressured, it took every fibre in his body to decline the offer.

There was a brief twitch in the corner of the king's eyebrow before he retrieved his hand, taking another drag before he leaned against the column of the steps; pocketing a hand in his black fitted slacks.

"Are you not afraid you'll get caught, Your Majesty?" Dream found himself asking, immediately regretting doing so when he realized how much of a pussy he sounded.

First off, you're going to decline his offer of getting high. Secondly, you're going to tax off your fear of getting caught doing drugs.

But instead of laughing at him or countering his question with a smart remark, George's eyes danced at the ground as he softly said. "Do I look afraid?" And his eyes remained briefly on the ground—certainly not because he was shy, which was clear when he looked up at Dream, unmoved.

And though his answer should have been ‘no’, Dream found himself answering with. “I don’t know yet.”

Because Dream was certain this was a facade the brunet settled for; though the reason behind it was still unclear to Dream, hence the uncertainty laced with his response.

But what Dream really wondered was how the brunet felt in this exact moment; given the way they were strangers, lingering outside when a party awaited their presence. It was awkward and tense for Dream, but the king, once again, seemed entirely unaffected—his lungs welcoming every puff of smoke he took.

So, what is going through your head? Dream wondered as he tried to look anywhere other than the king; though he wanted nothing more than to keep his eyes on him, he knew he would just pass as skeevy and weird.

The last thing he wanted to do was throw him off or tip his interest, were he to gain any at some point. Dream hadn’t admitted to himself that he did, indeed, want the king’s interest.

Because he looked like *that*; all lovely in his lace button-down and fitted black slacks, neck and fingers dressed in gold jewellery, nails painted sky blue and *still wearing that crown*.

Not quite wanting to go inside, but also needing an excuse to look at him, Dream posed another question. “Don’t you need to get those from the overworld?”

Dream, for reasons assessed, hadn’t expected George’s eyes on him; or the barely detectable inquiry in his expression that the blonde wouldn’t have been able to pick up on if he wasn’t so obsessed with figuring him out.

Dream nodded his head to the blunt that rested loosely between George’s fingers, understanding that he hadn’t properly phrased his question.

The king let out a quiet sigh, Dream was momentarily scared for having annoyed him, but he replied; tone distant. “Prince of Terra alchemizes them.”

George’s eyes were still somewhere on his blunt or the ground; Dream knew that he wasn’t actively avoiding eye contact. The lack of visual retention wasn’t like the nervousness that the blonde still possessed.

Whilst the brunet took another drag of the blunt, one that the blonde noted seemed longer than the previous times, Dream said. “Good.” Immediately regretting his impulsivity in speaking his mind when George looked at him, eyebrow slightly quirked. “It’s just...” *Nice. Have fun digging yourself out.* “...the drugs the mundanes take are garbage.”

The sudden change in the king’s expression caused a cold breeze down Dream’s spine as he envisioned a mini-him digging the hole he created somehow deeper than it already was.

Having George’s eyes on him further worsened the ache in his chest, especially when he callously said, “And you would know...how, exactly?”

Dream stared back, blinking a couple of times as he inaudibly swallowed. “I just,” He began too soon, not having formulated a single thought that would defend his opinion that he blindly believed in because of his prejudice. “They’re not exactly the strongest beings on this earth.” And the hole around him kept expanding when the king gradually squinted at him. “So, I assume their drugs aren’t as hard-hitting as Prince Karl’s alchemy.”

“Mundanes are fragile.” The king countered and Dream, who didn’t quite believe he would win this argument—one that he had *not* meant to initiate—still thought he made some good points, but having them so effortlessly countered had his lips firmly shut. “You see their fragileness as weak when it’s what makes them real.” The brunet parried his eyes to the ground as he flicked the now finished blunt onto the gravel, twirling the sole of his boot to put it out. “They’re the winning creatures, Your Highness. Not us.”

With that, George made his way up the steps, leaving Dream in a similar state as the last time they spoke.

Dream knew there was an underlying message that could further explain who the king was at his core, but he was still recovering from the fact that he had once again lost his attention.

And it wasn’t that his counter-argument had denounced Dream of his opinion towards mundanes, but it was the way the king was so nonchalant while still getting his point across—not once looking up as he finished his counter-attack—leaving him with no goodbyes before the door, once again, felt like it had been slammed in his face.

Cursing himself for failing at his second attempt in a successful conversation, straying him further and further away from obtaining the king’s interest, Dream reluctantly walked up the steps to meet his father and Sapnap amidst a party he was never in the mood for.



George knew from the moment he had met the Prince of Vulcan that he wouldn’t deviate far from who his father was; a power-hungry, cocky bastard with a superiority complex.

And who the fuck refuses free drugs? In this economy? George rolled his eyes as he jogged down the rocky steps leading back to the dance floor where he could spot Karl and Niki dancing carelessly in the sea of bodies.

He was a daddy’s boy who was most likely a mini-Sebastian in the works; George spotted a waving hand at one of the tents; Quackity was sat by himself on a white couch under the fairy lights framing the veiled roof.

George nodded his head at him, almost walking in his direction until the corner of his eyes spotted the table with rows upon rows of wine glasses.

He stopped in his tracks, his umber eyes glazing over the filled glasses until they detected the opened wine bottle.

He reached over, grabbed it by its neck and his heart nearly leaped out of his chest when he realized how heavy it was; *it was still full.*

George tipped the bottle back after wrapping his lips around the rim, taking a big swig before pulling it away from his lips to immediately catch King Sebastian’s eyes on him.

George fought the urge to flip him off after taking in the judging stare that he was sure even Sebastian wasn’t aware he expressed.

Instead, George shot him the fakest smile he could muster before it dropped off his expression in an instant as he walked towards Quackity, but not before briefly taking notice of Prince Vulcan who joined his father’s side; *God, help the Vulcan realm when that son of a bitch perishes, what with the next in line being his reincarnation.*

“Where were you?” Quackity asked the moment George plopped down on the sofa next to him.

“Getting mangled.” George offered him a forced smile before taking another swig of the wine, his eyes lazily glazing over the dance floor.

“Still not done, I see.” Quackity leaned forward, his elbows resting atop his parted knees.

A few moments passed, George barely taking a breather in between his swigs, ignoring Quackity’s suggestions to take it easy. After a while, Quackity seized all advice, knowing it was hopeless to convince him to slow down.

“Prince of Vulcan hasn’t stopped looking over here, dude,” Quackity said, his playful tone earning George’s eyes.

“And?” George went to take another swig, but a mere drop fell onto his tongue as he realized he had drained all of the bottle’s content.

“I know for a fact he’s not looking at me, so…” Quackity trailed off, ripping George’s attention from the room he scanned for another bottle of wine. “...is that who you were out talking to? Seeing as Karl came back way before you did.”

George nodded, leaning back in his seat before disposing of the bottle onto the bamboo table in front of them.

“What were you guys talking about?” Quackity asked through an amused smile.

George let out a sigh, annoyed that he couldn’t spot a bottle in sight. “Nothing. He was being a cocky prick.”

George couldn’t even focus on the conversation if he tried; he could feel Quackity’s eyes on him, stating that he was going to elongate the discussion.

Sure, he was feeling nice and warm with the wine and the intermingling smoked herbs that had him in a cross-faded state, but he wanted to not be aware of his surroundings. And he was getting there, but not if he had to sit and have conversations without a drink or blunt in his hand.

“Sounds likely.” Quackity scoffed. “What did he say?”

“Said we’re stronger than mundanes,” George spoke through a tired sigh.

Quackity shrugged, unaffected. “He’s not wrong.” George shot him a light glare, which urged him to continue. “We literally *are* stronger than mundanes. They can’t lift rocks, throw fire, bend water, or create tornados—”

George spoke through a mild, endeared smile as he quietly said. “S’not the point.”

Quackity’s words clipped off with his pressed lips as he looked back at who George assumed was the prince before he quickly returned his eyes to the brunet. “I just caught him looking *again*. Dude, I *think* he has a crush on you.”

George scoffed a terse laugh. “How unfortunate for him.”

Admittedly, if the prince wasn’t such a dickhead, George would have considered a one-night stand with him; but *one*: he wasn’t trashed enough, and *two*: though he liked sleeping with pretty strangers every now and then, following a party, he didn’t have the energy tonight.

It didn't take much for George to be attracted to someone; he could always find one thing that he would zero in on, one thing that would be enough to pull them in between his bedsheets for a night of *near* -euphoria.

And though the prince had pretty green eyes that had George momentarily lost for a brief moment while they were out talking, his arrogance had ripped the brunet out of his trance in a flash.

"You're right." Quackity's voice seeped through his thoughts. "Imagine having to put up with some idiot that goes *on* and *on* about art, literature and all that nerdy shit."

George looked at him through lidded eyes, a drunken smile forming on his lips as he shook his head at him.

Their conversation was interrupted when a weight dropped beside George, accompanied by an arm slung around his shoulders.

"Hey, handsome," Karl spoke through a dull smile, his hair sticking to the dots of sweat on his forehead.

Niki walked around the table, taking a seat on Quackity's armrest. "I am *exhausted*. I can't feel my feet."

"Well, yeah, no shit—" Karl and Quackity began a chorus of complaints about Niki wearing heels on the dance floor, hence her distress, which only earned them Niki's rebuttals; a brief back and forth between his three friends ensued.

Another hour had passed, at the end of which George reached the state of consciousness or lack thereof, that he craved.

Two empty bottles of champagne and six empty wine glasses occupied their table; Karl's, Niki's, and Quackity's laughter mediated with the live music, their conversations going in all kinds of different directions.

George would be lying if he were to say this wasn't the closest he'd gotten to the feeling of happiness; though momentary and fleeting, he was thankful for the three idiots that caused him delight given his shitty situation.

Once they were bevved and spliffed, they migrated to the dance floor. George noticed that whenever the four of them would get really into the feel of the music, they made the dance floor theirs.

Niki was the first to initiate their next move; clutching tightly onto Karl's and Quackity's hand, tending their arms to create a half-circle. George, in his drunken state, reluctantly abided, holding Quackity's and Karl's free hands as they formed a circle before they began to spin deliriously to the music booming from around them. Their heads were thrown back as they laughed at how ridiculous and obnoxious they seemed to others who offered them space to proceed freely with their shenanigans.

The music shifted with the hours of the night as it neared the A.Ms; the tempo of the song spoke for all the couples who sported bashful smiles as their partners pulled them onto the dance floor.

Not being a fan of showing affection and indulging in romantic ideals, though it was platonic, Quackity smiled and playfully rolled his eyes at Niki when she requested a dance.

"I think you owe me a dance, Your Majesty." Karl's voice spoke from behind George when the

dance floor contained groups dividing into pairs.

George sighed, eyes red-rimmed and heavy-lidded. "Mhm." He mumbled through a smile, procuring a giggle from Karl when he placed his hand in his; the sound of their clinking rings emitting their interlocked hands.

This wasn't the first time they slow danced, hence the lack of eyes on them as they moved fluidly into each other's steps amongst other couples.

A few seconds in, Karl pressed his palm against George's lower back, pulling him in abruptly, causing them both to laugh when the brunet stumbled into his chest.

George rested his cheek against his shoulder, his head suddenly heavy with the copious amount of wine and the blunt smoke wallowing in his system.

But though his eyes were barely opened, he caught sight of the Prince Vulcan; eyes glaring at a familiar man.

George blinked a few times, adjusting to the pair that seemed as though they were in a one-sided argument.

It was hard to see under the dim lighting, but his eyes caught the way the prince's fists were clenched at his side, almost as if he was holding back on a movement he wanted so badly executed.

George directed his eyes to the provoking source and found King Sebastian wearing a smile. And if George looked a little closer, he would see it laced with menace and taunt.

But the prince, George's eyes deflected to the boy who stood a few inches taller than the man he was clearly infuriated with, his lips were pressed into a thin line.

George moved with Karl, eyes still on the scene unravelling a few meters from where they danced. And he regretted the lingering gaze the moment Prince of Vulcan's eyes were on him.

George seized in his steps, Karl stopped with him but continued to sway them side to side.

The blonde seemed to have relaxed under George's stare; the both of them held each other's eyes for a moment.

He looked different than he had a few hours ago, in the moonlit courtyard. George's brows knitted with his thoughts, his feet moving in tandem with Karl's, but his eyes dancing with the blonde's. Mainly because of his predetermined anger, but it made the brunet feel as if he miscalculated something.

Something. Prince of Vulcan tore his eyes from George when he briefly reset his glare onto his father before turning on his heel, leaving the sidelines of the dancefloor. His guard was the only one to go after him.

Though they had held eye contact before, nothing felt as telling as that one, and yet George still had no idea what had occurred between the father and the son.

And though it had caught his attention, he found himself looking at King Sebastian for a moment before looking at the exit the prince had taken, until the interest vanished with the rest of his thoughts.

You're just high, he told himself.



Neptunalia came down with the tents and the stage; attendees filing out, workers of the palace clearing the tables along with any decoration that was left astray.

George and Quackity were hiding away in Cole's study while Karl had stayed behind to help Ana in the kitchen, despite his help not being asked.

Niki was stolen away by her mother before the three boys could even ask her to stay behind for another intoxicated sleepover.

"Thank you, sweetheart."

Ana's voice came within Quackity's and George's range when they entered the kitchen after the commotion had clearly died down. The grand space was rid of any workers; only Karl, Ana, and Cole sat at the island.

"Boys," Cole noted the pair as they settled on the stools around the island.

"Colbert." Quackity curtly nodded at him. "Lookin' a little plastered there, pal. How are you feeling?" He reached over, wrapping a firm hand on Cole's shoulder as he shook him lightly.

George smiled softly when his father chuckled, drunkenly, at Quackity's teasing. "That's...what, two glasses of wine in?"

"Two?" Karl laughed. "Oh, *c'mon*, Cole—"

"*Cooooole*," Quackity chorused, deriving a laugh from the taunted man.

"I think my night ends here." Cole lightly threw his hands up, walking around the island to make his exit, ruffling George's hair on his way out. "Goodnight, hooligans. Thank you, Ana. Food was fantastic, as always."

"Oh, you're most welcome." Ana smiled at him, waving him off as did the other three men before Cole left them in the brightly lit kitchen. "Well. Anyone hungry before I sign off?"

"Rest, Ana," George assured, earning a soft smile from her.

"I'm gonna go take all this shit off." Karl motioned to his suit and jewellery. "See you upstairs?" He lowered his gaze onto George who gave him a weak thumb-up.

Quackity and George were left at the island; silence filled their space, not in a way that affected either of them as they allowed the lack of conversation to progress.

Quackity didn't have to ask George if he wanted a glass of water before sliding a full one across the island, following the task of filling one up for himself.

George almost wished the clear liquid would take the form of any type of alcohol that could bring him back to how he felt under that veiled tent.

Though he had been gifted with the power to move and shape water, it wasn't beneficial when it came to turning it into wine.

That, if he remembered correctly in the two days of which he had tried his best to read the bible

before tossing it into the bin, *was something only Jesus could do.*

So, instead of yearning for an escape from reality, George decided to bother Quackity to feel *something* so as to distract him from the few minutes of slight sobriety until pending sleep enrobed him into temporary death.

“Can’t believe you wore that to Neptunalia,” George smirked against the rim of his glass.

And just as presumed, Quackity was ready to rebut. “What would you have had me wear?” He leaned his forearms into the island, no longer sitting on the stool next to George, but rather standing vis à vis him.

“Anything but that.” George swallowed the water as if it were alcohol to a non-drinker.

“I wore this to your coronation, dumbass.” Quackity snorted, taking a sip of his water and placing his glass onto the marble counter at the same time as George.

George furrowed his eyebrows. “And?”

“*And*, Neptunalia is just a festival. The coronation was the biggest moment of your life.” Quackity reasoned.

George scoffed lightly, eyes diverting to his glass. “The biggest moment of my life is when it ends, Quackity.”

“You can’t keep saying shit like that, man,” Quackity whispered.

George looked up from the counter where he blankly stared before reposing his eyes onto Quackity, who had his own narrowing at the slab of marble before them.

It was messed up, to think that way. Openly, at least. He wavered his gaze on his friend's slightly hung head. *Especially around Quackity, who devoted his entire life to keeping him alive.*

But it wasn't just about the fact that it was Quackity’s job.

George’s mother had found Quackity in really bad shape; living on the streets of the village following the abandonment of his parents. Their whereabouts are still unknown; Quackity had told Queen Anthea that he didn’t want to meet them when she had suggested they generate a search for them.

Regardless, George's family was Quackity's. And when George lost his mother; in some way, Quackity had, too.

And though it was Quackity's job to make sure he stayed alive, George knew that Quackity would take a bullet for him under any given circumstance. Mindless of his title or status.

Because George was all Quackity had.

Feeling a wave of remorse loom over him, one he hadn’t felt in a *long* while, George leaned into the counter, in search of Quackity’s eyes. “‘Ey.” He called out softly, not receiving his attention. “Quackmeister.” That had worked, just as George assumed, which caused a light smile to tug at his lips. “M’not planning on dying anytime soon.”

Quackity shot him an impish glare. “You’re not dying point-blank.”

George gave him a look before leaning back into his seat with a small sigh. “Old age is gonna get

to me eventually.”

A light smile grew on the younger’s lips as he looked at George through a grounded gaze. “You *are* getting quite old.”

George scoffed, slightly shaking his head at him before taking another sip of his water. He hated having to convince everyone that he *didn’t* want to welcome death with open arms, but he also knew it was his mess to clean if he was the one to have openly admitted to it.

As long as he kept it to himself, he wasn’t hurting anyone.

“Whenever we’d have to prepare for festivals, um...” Quackity began, clearing his throat as if he had a weight lodged in, which caused George to look over with hesitance. “...uh, she’d—your mo—Anthea would, um,” He cleared his throat again and George couldn’t bear to keep his eyes on him, so he quickly returned them to his glass. “She’d buy my suit in advance and, like, help me accessorize it. It’s, like, dumb wording it this way, but...” He faked a chuckle and it took everything within George to force his eyes onto him. “...she would dress me ‘cause...I didn’t know how to, like, do that...” He shrugged, forcing nonchalance into his nervous inclinations before looking to the side. “...for events and shit like that. So, I guess I just...didn’t have that, like, you know—this time ‘round.”

George knew that Quackity spent most of his growing years in the palace, under his parents’ rules. So everything that he was taught and everything he practiced came from George’s upbringing.

The issue was, Quackity wasn’t big on asking for help. He felt as if he had exhausted all of his requests when George’s mother brought him into their home, although it was no cost to her or anyone else that lived here.

In the consciousness of the woman who he could almost always feel towering over him in the most protective and guiding sense, George sat up in his stool slightly before saying, through a smile that pained him to formulate. “Saturnalia is the next festival,” He began, earning Quackity’s glossy eyes onto his. “And I can’t *wait* to pimp out your outfit.”

Quackity fought back a smile that begged its actuality through his defined cheekbones. “Yeah?” He cleared his throat, straightening his posture as he leaned back from the counter; they both let out a sigh as if a weight had been lifted off their chests. “I’m good with that. As long as you don’t dress me up in lacey shit.” He reached over for George’s glass before picking up his own.

“Not everyone can look this good, mate.” George nonchalantly spoke as he slid off his stool.

“*Mhm.*” Quackity washed the glasses before returning them to their respective spots; following behind George as they made their way out the kitchen. “Is that why Prince of Vulcan couldn’t keep his eyes off you?”

George lolled his head back, letting out a grunt that received a laugh from Quackity. “Oh my God. Shut the *fuck* up.”

And though he hadn’t really thought about the prince until then, a memory of somewhat familiar green eyes sparked his mind as George thought to himself; *you might have been high, but you still miscalculated something.*

helloooo.

this took a minute to get up. au!dnf is so hard to write in beginning chapters 'cause they're really starting from scratch and my impatience knows not slow burn for the life of it, but here we are ahah.

also! i put enemies to friends to lovers in the tags as if they were ever going to be enemies (that's my bad!) hope that doesn't steer some readers away, but yeah no, they're just gonna from friends to lovers. just at a reasonable pace, of course, and there is still gonna be angst bc i thrive off that shit.

hope you guys enjoyed this one! next chapter should be out in a week time, but you never know!

have a good day/night/evening/afternoon! x (:

Rhinestone Eyes

Chapter Summary

Dream is asked to convince George to fight alongside Vulcan against The Nether; but in the middle of the familiar, dingy village pub, the prince forgets his task entirely as he loses himself in the complexity that is King of Salacia.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



The tattooed ink in the shape of Vulcan amassed the dripping sweat peppering Dream's abdomen; the muscle flexed with the twist of his body as he dodged the blade of Sapnap's sword.

"Nice." Sapnap breathed out through an open-mouthed smirk before twirling the handle of his sword, the tip landing at an eye-level between the two of them.

Dream took a pause; eyes narrowing at the blade's apex before he flickered his gaze to Sapnap, his eyebrows shooting up cockily. "I know."

The surrounding mirrors of the Vulcan training room showcased the best friends maneuvering around each other; Dream dodging the calculated jabs of Sapnap's sword.

Sapnap drew his arm back and the tip of the blade dragged against the concrete ground, in tandem with the steps he took; his extended forearm displaying the tattoo matching Dream's.

Sapnap playfully rolled his eyes. "Give it *up* already."

"You haven't even tired me out yet, Sap. C'mon now. Let's see you do your best—" The tip of the blade made it to the blonde's jugular in a nanosecond, stealing the words straight from his mouth as his breath hitched.

They met eyes; a related smirk simultaneously growing on their lips.

"You talk too much." Sapnap gibed.

Dream fearlessly wrapped his hand around the middle of the heated steel, keeping his eyes fixed on his friend. "You celebrate too early."

Just as quick as the previous attack had been, the blonde took a step forward, hand still wrapped around the blade as he jutted his forearm into his friend's chest, punching his throat with his elbow and using his free hand to snatch the handle of the sword from him.

Sapnap had lost his weapon as it was now secured in Dream's grip; the younger of the two looked up at the other in slight annoyance, hand massaging his throat as he tried to recover.

"You're a psychopath," Sapnap spoke through a strained voice. "Who the fuck holds the blade like that?"

Pyrokinetic combat allowed Sapnap to transfer the heat within him to his blade; it had Dream fighting back the burn on his palm from the heated steel.

Dream had been through enough practice in the past to only momentarily suffer before getting over it. It was a conditioned response, one that he had mastered to give him a slight advantage in battle.

“You’re getting stronger.” Dream smiled, his back to Sapnap as he rearranged the sword on its rack.

“Guess I have a good trainer or something like that,” Sapnap quietly said, but weighted enough to sustain their smiles.

Dream briefly looked over his shoulder at the shorter. “Something like that.”

Sapnap hid his smile the moment they caught each other’s eyes before they returned to their benches to undo their hand wraps and remove their chest protectors.

“We should really start wearing our shirts when we do this.” Sapnap let out a deep huff, running a hand through his drenched-sweat hair. “I can sense a rash coming.” He patted the irritated skin on his chest.

Dream chuckled lightly. “Holds me back too much.”

Sapnap’s eyes widened at him. “Fucking tell me about it, bro.”

The door to the training room opened, splitting them from their conversation; two pairs of eyes switching from friendly to dull when transposed onto Punz.

Sapnap’s eyebrows shot up at Dream as he sent him a knowing look before he turned away from the brothers.

“What do you want?” Dream spoke through a worked sigh, scanning the bench for his shirt.

Punz leaned his shoulder into the doorframe, expression holding no interest or care as he blankly looked over the room. “Father wants to speak with you.”

Dream gave his brother a curt nod. “I’ll be there in a second.”

“Can you be quick—”

“Do you expect me to teleport?” Dream snapped; his short fuse always getting the best of him when around his family. “I said a second, didn’t I?” His tone was calmer, but it was still sizzling in its withering temper.

Punz waved him off lightly. “Whatever, dude.” And as he turned on his heel to make his way out of the training room, he groused under his breath. “Fuck me for trying to help.”

Dream remorsefully looked over at Punz, who he could see walk away from the shutting glass doors; he was rushing Dream because their father would reprimand him for being late.

Dream was aware that he was using the resentment towards his father and taking it out onto Punz.

And though it was nowhere near being Punz’s fault, Dream just couldn’t hold back the envy he felt whenever he would lay eyes on him; the son who could do no wrong in their father’s eyes.

He twirled his pocket knife in between his fingers; anger searing within him as he made his way to

his father's study.

The soles of his combat boots echoed through the long halls as he passed the many rooms that had been collecting dust since his mother's passing years ago.

Dream nearly stopped at a particular door; one that if he stood close enough, ear pressed onto the hardwood, he could imagine the soft humming emulating one of his mother's favourite songs.

But seeing as he was on his way to speak with his father, Dream figured he shouldn't linger about in the memory of her. It would only kindle the growing fire.

Dream reluctantly stepped into his father's study; the air-conditioned room coveting the blonde's exposed arms, due to the undershirt he wore, derived a shiver from him.

"You needed to talk?" Dream quietly asked, remaining in the doorway; the rhythmic twirling of his pocket knife slowing down.

King Sebastian barely looked up at him as he lifted two indolent fingers, curving them forward. "Shut the door, will you?"

Dream took in a quiet breath, eyes momentarily taking notice of Punz sitting comfortably in the velvet chair that faced their father's mahogany desk.

He reluctantly turned around to shut the door behind him; Punz had his lips pressed into his fist, his elbow resting on his armrest as he meekly looked at him through uninterested eyes.

Dream glanced at the two men before him before filling the seat next to Punz, eyes wavering on the sharp edge of his father's desk.

A silence longer than Dream—and Punz—would have wanted, passed the three of them; the brothers watched their father scribble something onto his notepad as they waited patiently.

Dream wasn't so patient, the twirling motion of the pocketknife aggravating with the passing seconds.

"So." Dream's halted fingers had the pocket knife coming to a stop, the brass metal resting in between his fingers as he looked up at his father. "The King of Salacia..." He simply stated, but the name caused a jumpstart in the blonde's heart rate. "Did you get along well with him?"

Dream shifted in his seat, eyebrows furrowed as he forced disdain over the surprise in his expression. "We didn't really speak, sir."

Sebastian let out a placid huff when he stood up from his chair, still not having looked at his eldest son as he walked over to the rack holding three of his prized swords.

He picked one up from the holder; Dream and Punz caught each other's looks for a moment before they abruptly looked away. Something had been mutely transpired, a mutual feeling towards the man that stood before them.

"I need you to get in his good graces," Sebastian demanded, only his back visible to his sons who watched him admire his blade.

Dream's brows knitted as he leaned forward in his seat. "May I ask why?"

For the first time since having entered the room, Dream received his father's eyes, though he

wished he hadn't. There was an obvious hint of annoyance; arising from the fact that he *knew* he had to tell Dream 'why', and would absolutely hate doing it.

But Dream was suddenly intrigued; he had thought he was just being called into the office to talk regular business, but his father had just mentioned George.

The one person Dream had not stopped thinking about since last night. And those dark russet eyes that studied him from across the dance floor, invested in a situation he knew nothing about.

"We need his realm to fight by our side against The Nether." Sebastian naturally concluded, disposing of one sword onto his desk, dark green eyes indulging in the weapon Dream remembered spending *hours* crafting.

But something he had said ripped Dream's attention from the way his father marvelled at the sword *he* fabricated.

"Sir?" Dream requested his reiteration as he always did; *because what the fuck was his father on about most of the time?*

Sebastian's eyebrows lightly shot up at Dream as if his son's response had taken *him* by surprise. "Is something not making sense?"

Dream bit his tongue, mentally coaxing himself before he calmly replied. "I just wasn't aware that we even had troubles with The Nether, to begin with."

"They've sent us a threat, Clay," Sebastian said, tone laced with exasperation as if his son was the one not keeping up.

And Dream wasn't keeping up because this was just being sprung out on him.

Noticing the awkward shift at his side, Dream averted his eyes to his brother who looked beyond uncomfortable; mouth still pressed into his fist as if he was holding something back.

This was such a common occurrence that it didn't take much for Dream to pull the pieces together; whatever he wasn't in on, Punz probably already was. *That* turned up the ante at which Dream's blood boiled.

"With all due respect, you are stating this as if it is something I should know." Dream tried his best to sound reposed, but the way his father failed to look at him; eyes dancing on his sword as he seemed unfazed, inched him closer to the edge.

"I definitely mentioned it." Sebastian finally said, nearing the truth behind his son's cognizance.

"I can assure you that *I* wasn't told anything." Dream pressed, entering a state of mind that strayed from his emotional vestibule.

"Well, I mean..." Sebastian trailed off, dragging the tip of his finger across the blade. "...I told Luke."

Of course, you did, Dream took a measured breath, jaw set as he narrowed his eyes on his father. "But you didn't tell *me*."

Sebastian's eyes flew to his, an emotion Dream had perceived as diluting anger from receiving it so many times in the past. "Is there a reason I should have?"

“I am the *next in line*, sir.” Dream, though having lost his composure which was past salvation, still held the conditioned addendum of ‘sir’ in his statement.

I am your eldest son. I am to receive your crown when you pass on. I am the next one in charge.

Dream had so many more things he wanted to say, but the further he lost himself under the melting glare of his father’s eyes, the more distant he felt from vocalizing them.

“Precisely.” His father clipped. “And you are *only* that until I am no longer ruling. So as long as I am in charge, I decide what information goes to who—”

His father’s words were cut off by the sound of Dream’s chair scraping against the floorboards as he stood up vastly, his fuse blown out way past redemption.

“Then I suppose you should ask Luke for assistance. Since you trust him so much more—”

Before he could finish his sentence or even blink, his father’s hand was on the handle of the sword that once laid on his desk before the tip of it was delving into Dream’s neck.

There was a clear scrape heard from Punz’s chair; his shock was audibly displayed.

“I did not raise a *fool* who feels *hurt* by the feeling of being *excluded*,” Sebastian spoke through the baring of his teeth, looking Dream down from his lidded eyes. “Do I make myself clear?”

Dream’s chin was slightly inclined; his breathing shallow as he felt the sharp edge digging into his skin.

And as he failed to answer, the puncture drew in, causing him to squeeze his eyes shut as he answered through a whisper. “Yes—”

“Look into my eyes when you’re speaking to me.” Sebastian pressed the tip of the blade further against his son’s neck; Dream was sure that just a flimsy slip would have the edge fully jabbed in.

Forcing his eyes open as his lips wavered in a snarl, Dream spoke through gritted teeth. “Yes.”

Sebastian waited a few more seconds before withdrawing his sword, eyes deflecting to his desk before he placed his palms onto the slab of wood. “Get in his good graces. Do as you’re told.”

Dream could almost feel the ache in his mouth from how hard he was grinding his teeth; his jaw squared as he glowered down at his father who sat quietly in his seat.

Without looking up again, though a lot less reserved than he was when Dream had first entered, Sebastian gnarled. “Now get lost.”

Dream knew that if he didn’t leave in that exact moment, he would execute a move he would never come back from. A move that would only cause a ripple of events to follow.

Turning vastly on his heel, Dream stalked out of the office, ready to retrieve the peace his room offered before a voice stopped him.

Frail and weak, forgiving and sorry; Punz called out to him. Dream slowed down in his tracks, not quite turning around as he bit back his vociferous rage.

‘It’s not his fault.’ He tried to envision those words being softly spoken from his mother’s voice. *‘Do not take your anger out on him.’*

Punz exasperatedly said. “Clay.”

'And of course,'

"Brother." He necessitated his attention.

'Never forget that he is just as damned as you.'

"He said it wasn't important for you to know. Otherwise, I would have told you."

Dream's eyes fluttered shut as he took in a deep breath; looking over his shoulder, not quite meeting his brother's eyes, and quietly saying. "You should know better than to listen to him, Luke."

And knowing, again, that he had to walk away before he allowed his temper to get the best of him, Dream left without allowing his brother to say another word to help his case.

Because she was right, Dream stopped at the heavy double doors leading to her solace, anyone under his control underwent the same treatment, he placed his palm against the hardwood, just to different extents.



When drowning his liver in alcohol and filling his lungs with blunt smoke, George fell asleep easier but also woke up earlier. And quite frankly, he hated waking earlier than he was meant to; having to face his reality when his dreams soothed him out.

After disposing of his wet toothbrush into the ceramic cup, his eyes deflected to the tap; no water coursing through it. His eyes narrowed at the silver nozzle as he bit his lip; a thought consuming him.

How the hell are you meant to control an entire realm of people if you don't even know how to use your powers? George huffed as he flickered his gaze up to his reflection.

You've never fought a day in your life. He shook his head, his eyes shaking shut. *Idiot.*

Unthinkingly, he flipped up the handle of the tap; the water erupting into the bowl of his sink. *How hard can it really be?* He took in a deep breath, jaw set as he fixed his eyes on the water.

You were born under Neptune. It's in you. He gave himself a curt nod before focusing so hard, the water almost lost its meaning under his eyes.

And then, nothing happened.

The tap continued to serve its purpose; directing the water towards the drain as it would if a mundane were to stare at it.

But you're not mundane. George let out a frustrated sigh as he rolled his shoulders, flickering his eyes to his reflection before yielding them to the water once more. *Just focus, idiot.*

And after a solid minute of losing himself in trying to make the water shift from anywhere other than the drain, nothing happened.

Nothing happened.

"What are you doing?" Karl's groggy voice sounded from behind him.

George lifted his glare from the sink to the mirror ahead; Karl joining his reflection as he

approached his side.

“Nothing.” *Nothing fucking happened*, George lightly nudged the handle of the tap, turning around to make his way back to his bedroom. “All yours.” He mumbled under his breath as he brushed past Karl.



Karl let out a chorus of coughs as he passed the ceramic pipe with the smoking herbs to George. “Went down—” He hacked up again; the brunet only watched him, slightly amused. “—the wrong p-pipe.”

George sucked the smoke from the pipe before striking the lighter again, hovering the flame over the herbs in the bowl.

The two friends were lingering out on George’s balcony; starting their morning smoking the last bit of alchemized loose herbs that Karl had brought out with him for Neptunalia.

Karl leaned into his crossed forearms that rested on the brick terrace. “The sky always looks so dull.”

George puffed out the inhaled smoke after letting a bit linger in his throat. “It *is* always Winter here, so.”

“I get the obsession with wanting to die now.” Karl lightly joked, reaching for George’s shoulder to give it a light shake.

A small silence passed them; sounds of rustling leaves and gusts of wind passing through, sending chills down their bodies which now felt coated in the warmth that the drugs offered them.

“Hey,” Karl unobtrusively began, not really needing George’s eyes on him as he continued through a smile. “Play the piano for me?”

George looked at him instantly; expression dull until he saw the hope in the younger’s eyes.

No one was quite as immersed in art, music and literature as George was, but Karl was leaning.

And George didn’t really like playing in front of anyone; he always thought the chords he pulled together were too melancholic for most people to find beautiful.

But not Karl. He would always sport that endearing and soft smile as he attentively listened; eyes sometimes closed as he appreciated the heavy melodies.

Sat on the stool of his piano while Karl laid on his back atop the frame of the grand instrument, George played for him; the hammers moving in tandem with the brunet’s delicate fingers over the white and black keys.

Both of them were so immersed in the canorous sound that they failed to hear the door to George’s bedroom open.

“Alright, Beethoven,” Quackity called out, his voice seizing George’s moving fingers on the keys; clapping his hands in an ushering manner, the raven-haired boy continued. “Cole’s asking for you. Breakfast. Let’s move.”

George was thankful that the potency of the herbs was still appeasing the headache that had begun

forming from the moment he woke; catching Cole's resolute gaze informed him of the older's pending demand.

Cole wasted no time in stating his reasoning behind wanting George to attend breakfast. "We need you at the head of the table."

George should have known it had something to do with his kingship seeing as he was never asked or forced to come downstairs for breakfast in the past.

"Father," George spoke through a beaten-down voice; not in an attempt to guilt-trip him as he knew Cole could not be conned. "*Not* today."

"I wish I was in control of that, but—"

"You are." George furrowed his eyebrows, confusion with a trace of irritation clear in his appearance. "It is our realm. We should make the rules."

"We *did* make the rules, son," Cole spoke softly, his tone apologetic for having to force this upon his son. "And now we must follow them."

Not we. George's jaw shifted as he rejected his father's words. *Mother's ancestors did.*

And though it had acted as no problem to past rulers, it posed a lot more than one for George.

Because he wasn't mentally or physically built to go by the rules; his mindset did not align with that of his ancestors. Not even that of his mother's.

Despite her being the kindest soul George had the pleasure of knowing, she was still brought up as a warrior. Raised by tyrants that lived and breathed battles.

And though George had been growing around similar, less discourteous versions of warriors, he never had the desire to learn from them.

"I know you would like more time," Cole said, this time inching himself closer to his son so the words could rest within their proximity. "And believe me, if it were in my control, I would not have you sit where your..." His lips pressed into a firm line, the muted words understood through the connection of their sorrowed eyes. "...there is no one else that deserves that seat more than you, George."

George lightly scoffed. "I'm the only one who *can* take that seat, father."

"Then take it with pride—"

"I do not wish to be king." George found himself saying, the words gliding off his tongue.

Though Quackity and Karl had been engaged in a conversation with each other, the slight rise in George's tone had reached the two bystanders.

"I know." Was all that Cole *could* say and George couldn't even blame him.

Because what was he supposed to say?

The crown was inherited throughout the generations of his mother's lineage, not Cole's. He wasn't a royal; just a man who fell in love with one. And who was there to carry out her plan because their son couldn't do it for her.

George cleared his throat; the growing ache displaying his guilt towards the lack of war-mentality his mother held. *If he had just a fraction of that, all of this wouldn't be so fucking hard.*

“Can Quackity sit next to me?” George forced his eyes onto his father, tone staggering despite having swallowed the threatening pang.

Upon hearing the mention of his name, because he had been eavesdropping, Quackity placed a hand on George’s shoulder. “What’s up?” He welcomed himself into the conversation, hesitantly so as he narrowed his eyes between the father and the son.

“Sit with me.” George more so ordered than requested.

Quackity had no reaction to the bluntness of the order, immediately nodding. “Yeah, of course, man.”

“And Karl?” George placed his eyes onto his father, who only offered him a disapproving look. “You’re fucking kidding.” He deflected his irritation to the floorboards, muttering the words under his breath so as to not project his resentment towards a man who did not deserve it.

“It’s all good, man.” Karl joined his side, throwing an arm around his shoulders. “I should probably go see my mother.” Turning his attention to Cole, he put his hand out. “Old man.” He greeted with a playful smile.

Cole’s lips cracked a soft upswing. “Tell Felicity I say ‘Hi’.” He placed his hand in Karl’s, giving it a firm shake.

“Will do.” Karl clicked his tongue, shooting a finger-gun his way before reaching for Quackity’s face, gingerly landing a light slap against his cheek. “See you soon. Love you.”

“Don’t be late for practice tomorrow.” Quackity reminded as he watched Karl turn on his heel to exit the palace.

George retreated in his steps as he followed behind Karl, earning the man’s attention. “I’ll walk you out.” He quietly said as he walked past him.

If George was a vocally aggressive person, he would be taking that moment with Karl to let out all his frustrations, but instead, the two of them lingered next to the portal in a small silence.

Until George breathed out heavily, a gust of mist coursing past his lips. “Karl—”

“I know.” Karl huffed and threw his arms around him, pulling George into a tight embrace.

George sighed, resting his forehead atop his shoulder. “I can’t.”

The feeling of Karl’s hand shifted from his back to the nape of his neck. “I know.”

George muttered into the warmth of their pressed bodies. “Everything is moving so fast.”

“It’s just breakfast.” Karl’s voice sounded muffled against his temple, but George felt his chest jerk against him with a small laugh.

George stepped out of the hug, Karl kept them close; his hands lightly curved onto the brunet’s shoulders. “It’s just all so *dumb*. All these shitty systems and codes of conduct that I’m gonna be forced to follow...” He took in a small breath, shaking his head. “What’s next? Not even giving me a chance to finish my breakfast before dragging me to practice? Swinging swords at my mates?”

Mates who I can no longer have said breakfast with?”

Though never raising his voice, the fervency behind most words spoken stated his hatred for the unravelling events.

Karl pursed his lips as he dropped his hands from George’s shoulders. “There is a chance they *might* let you finish your breakfast.”

George’s eyes fluttered shut with the tug at the corner of his lips; once again, his smile groundless in his friend’s presence.

“And you have Alex. He’s gonna be hurt to think you don’t consider him a ‘*mate*’.” Karl emphasized the syllables of the last word; the imitation of his friend’s accent coming out more Australian than English.

“When have I ever cared about what Quackity thinks?” George’s voice had mellowed down to its natural cadence; crushed and toneless.

Karl casually snorted. “*Pft*. You two can pretend to hate each other all you want but you’re not fooling anyone.”

George quirked an eyebrow, his smile wavering on his lips.

“Anyway.” Karl cleared his throat and fished into the pocket of his velvet brown jacket. “Here.” He said as he pulled out a white tin, rectangular shaped. “My final pre-rolled joint.” He juttet it against George’s lower abdomen. “*And* my finest. *So* fine it’ll liberate you from systemic hell.”

George chuckled weakly, graciously taking the offered tin box from his friend’s hand.

“Come here.” Karl returned both hands on his shoulders before pulling him into a tight embrace; placing a soft kiss into the nest of his hair before coaxingly saying. “Whatever they throw your way, you can handle it.” His breath parted the ends of George’s hair with every word he spoke. “You’re one of the strongest people I know, George.”

George relaxed in his hold; enjoying the last bit of familiarity before he was thrown into a situation so uncomfortable it was making him nauseous the more the thought lived in his mind.

“Would now be a bad time to say I can’t come out for drinks tonight?” Karl was immediately shoved by George; light, but firm enough that it caused a stumble in the taller’s steps. “I can’t be late for practice with Alex—”

“That’s *why* I’m cross, to be honest.” George shot him a sly glare.

When in reality, George didn’t really mind drinking alone. It just helped to have someone there in case the alcohol wasn’t hitting hard enough. He just *always* needed a distraction.

“Soon, you’ll be on the practice field with us. And the adrenaline, the power you hold, the feeling of being invincible...” Karl snapped his fingers at him, the swirling light of the portal animating the closer he got to it. “It’ll all make sense.”

George cocked his head to the side; briefly glancing down at the ground before saying. “It will never make sense to me, Karl.”

George noticed Karl’s eye roll when he looked over at him. “You are *so* stubborn. Why do I even put up with your shit?”

“Cause.” George pocketed his hands, his coveted fist gripping the tin can Karl had gifted him. “You love me.” His smile widened as he watched Karl dwell on the thought for theatrical purposes.

“You make a good point.” Karl stepped one foot past the glowing light; so bright it almost pained George’s hungover as he was still adjusting to the bright daylight. “Raincheck on those drinks. If I find out you went drinking without me, I’ll be hurt.” He pointed at him threateningly, only earning a shaking head from his friend. “Love you, handsome!”

George fought back a smile as he sent him a subtle wink, content with himself when the beaming smile on Karl’s face was the last thing he saw before the taller disappeared into the portal.

The air around him seemed a lot heavier with Karl now gone.

And as he lingered in the courtyard for a moment longer, he noticed the gradual decline in his smile; the awaiting soldiers in the dining room diminishing his mood and his preset high from this morning.

And as he was being guided by Quackity to the dining room, where he was to sit where his mother once did, all he could think about was how he was so beyond unfit for the position that had been sprung onto him.

George would no longer be able to sit at the kitchen island with his friends; chatting over breakfast and listening to soft tunes from Ana’s radio.

He would be ripped away from his solace to attend meetings and be forced to go to sleep at a reasonable hour to attend duties that could only be assessed at dawn.

And this was only the mere surface of what kingship was to uphold for him. Slowly, but surely, it would be requested of him to abandon all freedom that came with being prince.

And with every rotting moment spent in that chair as he sat uncomfortably, his breakfast untouched with Quackity surveying him worryingly, all he could think about was that god damn blunt; his fingers itching to light it, to welcome the smoking herbs in his system, offering him an escape from this rule-driven Kingdom.



The flickering sign above the wooden door stared back at viridian irises; the cursive letters spelling out ‘*Elemental Village Pub*’ notified Dream that he had arrived at the right place.

He mentally blocked out the memory of the last time he was here; every thought attached to this place reminding him of *her* pain.

As much as he didn’t *want* to be here, his father’s voice continued to pester him endlessly: ‘*Get in his good graces.*’ Dream nearly rolled his eyes at how he was going out of his way to execute his father’s demand.

Because despite the vile mistreatment he faced, he would always find himself back to square one with him.

Dream hadn’t expected to *not* find King George anywhere other than his palace, but upon arriving at the doorsteps, the blonde was met with the brunet’s father; the information given leading him to this godforsaken place.

He supposed that even if he wasn't told of George's specific whereabouts, he could have figured that one out.

He was hesitant to go in; the memories of coming down here to retrieve her never ended well.

And he wondered if George's reasons for being here were the same as *her's*.

You're reaching for familiarity in someone you know nothing about, Dream shook his head as he placed a hand on the wet door handle.

He stepped inside and the bell above the door-hinge emitted a chime to state his presence. No one looked over, the bottom of their drinks having their full attention.

And as he scanned the bar, populated by village men and some familiar faces belonging to the Vulcan soldiers, his eyes finally landed on the face he'd been searching for.

Dream straightened his posture as he took in a quiet breath, momentarily lost in the sight of him.

George was sitting at the bar, slouched shoulders delivering his emotions which he never facially showed. His eyes were dancing in the brown liquid occupying his glass, his dainty fingers jacketing the drink.

And for once, he wasn't sporting his royal mantle, yet his crown still sat lovely on his head.

The cream-coloured sweater did his skin wonders as he sat under a dim-lit, yellow saucer light. One that accentuated the ends of his lashes. Or the small glistening droplet of alcohol resting on his bottom lip after he had taken a sip.

The blonde teetered on his footing for a moment longer, watching the way the brunet's tongue poked out over his bottom lip to slick the alcohol residue as if he couldn't let any go to waste—somehow in the most delicate, swift movement—before he drew in his lip between his teeth.

Dude, Dream forced his eyes away from the scene. *What are you doing?*

Squaring his shoulders before walking over, Dream mentally coaxed himself for the act of persuading a man—one who was, by far, the most emotionally unattainable human he's met—to fight alongside his realm in a battle against The Nether.

Fuck, maybe he should've brought Sapnap with him. Dream's steps visibly slowed as he reached George, taking a deep breath when he paused behind him.

But maybe it was a boyish act; his apathy, Dream thought as he took notice of how the king sat alone, *maybe he acted tougher when his friends were around*.

Finally mustering the courage, he took a seat next to George; the stool creaking beneath his weight notifying the brunet of his presence.

They caught each other's eyes, George was the first to look away.

And in a quick instance, Dream got a rush of disappointment—towards himself—because he hadn't even said a word and slight irritation could already be detected in the brief glance he received from the brunet.

Dream's fingers itched for the feeling of his pocket knife; twirling it around mindlessly to escape the undeniable nerves coursing through him as he sat there; not knowing how to act.

Order a drink or something, nimrod. Dream lifted two fingers up to catch the bartender's attention, but the man seemed as if he was in an engaging conversation with another customer. *A man that...looked sort of familiar.*

"You're not getting served anytime soon."

Dream's head snapped to his right; *he spoke.*

The blonde sat up slightly in his seat as he wavered his eyes on George's side profile; the brunet's dilated pupils were still fixed on his drink, the fingers of his free hand fidgeting with the rings he sported.

"Why's that?" Dream cleared his throat immediately after speaking, hating the way it sounded brash and hoarse.

"S'his best friend," George mumbled before taking a sip of his drink.

Dream returned his eyes to the conversing pair before settling them back onto the king; *I didn't come here for a drink, he wanted to say, I came here for you.*

Dream crossed his arms over the counter before deciding to keep his eyes on him; *what's the point of pretending that you aren't looking at him?*

He's not looking at you. He doesn't care. So, just look. "Do you know him personally?" Dream asked after a moment.

George shook his head in response. *Right.* Dream nodded as he briefly shifted his eyes to the space before the brunet; *two glasses.* One empty and one that he nursed.

Despite not getting much out of him, Dream calculated enough to come to a deduction. "You come here often."

That had earned him a maximum of two seconds of those umber eyes he was so deeply fascinated by, despite their emptiness every time he had them.

George returned them to his drink once more, the tip of his forefinger pushing off a ring as it landed on the counter in a circular motion before coming to a halt with a soft smack.

No answer. *Of course.* Dream inaudibly inhaled, looking away from him; *what the fuck do you say now?*

"You certainly don't."

George's voice was quiet amongst the indistinctive chatter happening around them. On top of the faint music playing from the overhead speakers against the wall, which was dressed with shelves supporting the bottles of alcohol.

So, you do answer the questions asked. Dream's eyes narrowed on the brunet's face; half of which was exposed to him, "No," *Just not directly.* "I don't." *Or not in a way that feels as if you are making the effort to answer to someone.*

There was a subtle tug at the corner of his lips, Dream was thankful that it had been on the side he was faced with.

"No, you don't," George repeated, mostly to himself as if he was parodying him. "Then why are

you here?" He indolently glanced at him; eyelids heavy, especially when his coffee-coloured eyes flickered down to Dream's lips. "Your Highness." He finished composedly, yet through slightly gritted teeth; as if the title tasted bitter on his tongue.

And he wasn't looking away, so Dream was having trouble getting his words out; put in a situation he wasn't accustomed to. "Um." He cleared his throat once more. "I was in the area."

George blinked at him, Dream soundlessly gulped.

Until the brunet's lips stirred up into a hesitant smile; he looked down at the space in between them before shaking his head. Dream wasn't sure what caused him to break into a similar smile, but he had.

"No one's ever just *in* the area." George continued softly, eyes steering back to his glass before he went to take another sip.

"I know." Dream nodded, eyes fluttering shut as he could feel embarrassment running through him. "I suppose I was just...bored." He dubiously looked at him.

It was easy for him, Dream remarked when the brunet didn't flinch at liquid he readily swallowed. *Almost as if it were his main source of hydration.*

When George wouldn't answer his questions, Dream was left to formulate another topic to keep the conversation alive.

But when George *did* answer, and the conversation died again, it somehow felt a lot harder to pick it back up; almost as if Dream had a taste of something that could be more, only to have it ripped away from him at a pace that physically pained him.

"Why do you come here?" The question sailed past Dream's lips before he could even catch himself, generating a muted self-insult.

George hadn't looked at him, but Dream immediately picked up on the crease in his forehead.

"I mean." Dream sighed, eyes swerving to the way George's fingers spun the ditched ring onto the counter. "You're a king." The brunet's fingers stopped in its movement, Dream's eyes immediately flickered up to his face as he awaited in mild fear of having, once again, fucked up. "Why drink in a dingy pub when you can...drink in the comfort of your own palace?"

And then there was that familiar upturn in the right side of the brunet's face; though it wasn't always genuine, rather weak and a tad bit bitter, it was still a reaction.

One that Dream had obtained with the words *he* spoke.

"Do I look uncomfortable?" George picked up the ring again, re-engaging it in its spinning action; his eyes lazily following the sound as well as the motion.

'Do I look afraid?' Dream thought back to the comely face under Salacia's night sky; blunt smoke blowing past his face as he, in fact, looked far from afraid.

No, "You don't." Dream replied, with a slight shake of his head.

Silence again.

The chatter behind them consisted of different conversations; passing words Dream could barely

focus on stringing together to make any sense. His attention was still surrendered to the brunet sat at his side; blank eyes dancing on the counter as he fished into his pocket to pull out a rectangular tinned box.

Dream's brows knitted at the object before George popped it open to reveal a joint. He realized then, due to his surprise, that seeing a joint in real-life tallied up to two since having met the brunet.

"Woah." Dream's eyes widened when the brunet placed the filter of the joint in between his lips.

George looked at him, half-taken aback by Dream's urgency; the joint hung loosely in between his lips with the lighter resting in his hand as he looked at him expectantly.

Dream looked over his shoulder at the bartender that was still mid-conversation with his friend before turning his attention back to George; the brunet had taken that time to light the joint, pocketing the lighter before hardly looking at Dream through unfazed eyes.

"Can you do that in here?" Dream leaned in slightly as if he were trying to shield the image of the king, smoking a joint, from the eyes of soldiers and villagers.

George fixed him; though his eyelids were tired and depressed, he had Dream's full attention when he took a long drag from the joint.

The faint crackling sound at the end burned red before he gingerly pulled the joint away, blowing a cloud of smoke above his head as if to purposely make a show of it.

Dream's eyes flew to the room, scanning heads; some that turned to look over at the extravagant smoke, and others that were unbothered by the sight.

"See anyone stopping me?" George's voice brought Dream's eyes back in his direction; the blonde's lips still parted as his verdant irises danced over the brunet's stoic smile.

Dream's brows knitted with a smile that seemed to reflect onto his face. "You just do whatever you want, don't you?"

George diverted his eyes to the counter, his free hand reaching for his ring again.

Dream envied him for having something to fidget with; though the brunet didn't seem to be doing it out of nerves, he still had something to occupy his hands with.

George took another drag from the joint before his words came out with the bit of smoke he hadn't inhaled. "They gonna kick the king out?"

Dream's eyebrows shot up warily as his eyes turned to the spinning ring. "For someone who hates being king, you sure are milking it, Your Majesty." He sat up in his seat once more, recovering from his initial shock due to the brunet's carelessness.

"M'reaping the benefits," George muttered, the joint moving with his talking lips.

And that didn't seem to hurt him either, Dream watched the brunet permit the smoke to linger in for as long as he could before puffing it out. The lack of vapour emitting past his lips vouching for his lack of discomfort.

Dream's eyes flickered up to the gold adorning to his loose, dark brown curls; some flopped over the metal band. "Is the crown part of the benefit as well?"

It's a dishevelled look for a royal, but— “It’s pretty.” George finished his thought, blowing the smoke in a straight, foggy line before it expanded over the wooden counter before them.

Dream could smell the essence of the burning herbs and it *wasn't* entirely repulsive. “Why...” He paused, eyes playing at the counter before bringing them back to George. “Why do you not want to be king?”

George allowed the smoking joint to rest in between his fingers, bringing that hand to jacket his half-filled glass before lightly pressing the rim to his bottom lip. “I’ve no interest in the duties kingship entails.” He muttered before taking a sip, cheekbones defined as he granted the alcohol to swing in between his tongue and the roof of his mouth.

His eyes heeded to George’s lips; the brunet’s tongue slicking them before he placed the filter of the joint in between the fleshy skin.

While George was consuming the things that bolstered the emptiness behind his eyes, Dream consumed every detail on his fair skin; his entranced eyes zeroing in on certain features, not a single thought being processed as he spoke his mind. “Then...what *are* your interests?”

George tilted his head to the side, taking another drag from the joint as his eyes blankly stared at the wall ahead.

Dream watched the brunet slip his ring on before his eyes flitted back to his face; *he wasn't replying to that*.

The blonde knew he’d have to consult his mental calculations; something that he realized he’d have to often do, were they to speak again after this interaction.

And the longer that realization settled in, the more he understood why it wasn’t *as* hard to put two and two together. And *why*, when trailing outside the pub, he had the inkling to find familiarity in this stranger.

It wasn’t hard piecing this puzzle because he’d done it before. He knew the disconnected pieces wouldn’t pull together the same picture, but it was the similarity in certain sections.

The similarity between two souls who he’d seen at peace in this exact spot.

With the pieces that he *was* familiar with, ones he had seen before they broke apart when *she* passed, Dream pushed his weight into his crossed arms; leaning forward to search for the king’s eyes. “Is it books?” He started, noticing the slight shift in the brunet’s gaze, pushing him to continue. “...Music?” The brunet let out a quiet sigh, reaching for his glass before he swallowed all of its content; Dream watched the way his Adam’s apple bobbed with the intake. “...Art?”

Out of all the times in which George had returned the glass to its previous spot, that was the first time it had emitted a clear noise.

Dream immediately retaliated; *maybe you're getting too comfortable*. He leaned back in his seat slightly and was thankful he did so when the brunet’s eyes met his.

The look he received was less impassive, now laced with a bit of annoyance. “Because if I’m not into stabbing innocent humans with swords and daggers, then I must be into all things art?” He tore his eyes away from the blonde, following the hand that coated the side of his glass.

Dream admired the way he hadn’t gotten loud while still transmitting his anger. “It’s just that heroes don’t know delicacy.” *Don't fuck this up*, he continued carefully. “The arts are for—”

“Let me guess.” George cut in, his chuckle was quiet and bitter as he. “The *fragile*.”

‘You see their fragileness as weak when it’s what makes them real.’

“The pure.” Dream countered.

George’s brows furrowed as he glanced at him. “And the damned—”

“And the beautiful.” Dream clipped, immediately regretting having cut him off when he noticed an unsettling growth in the brunet’s expression before he returned his copper-coloured eyes to his glass. “The battlefield isn’t beautiful. It’s not delicate. It’s ugly and rough—it’s—”

“It’s everything you’re made for,” George mumbled, thoughtlessly tapping his ring against his empty glass. “You don’t have to pretend that you hate it.”

Feeble hurt had gotten to Dream following that comment. “I’m not pretending.”

“Yet you’ll continue to fight.” George’s eyes weren’t on him, instead, they were scanning past the bar to catch the bartender’s attention.

“I...” Dream could no longer find the words as he began contemplating why that previous comment had hurt him the way it did. “...yes.”

In that meanwhile, George had succeeded in calling for the bartender. Ordering himself another drink, Dream brainlessly watched the stranger procure it for the brunet.

They both watched in aggravated silence.

The moment the drink had landed in George’s hand, Dream spoke; dismissing the eye-roll from the brunet. “It’s what I *do*.”

“*Mm*.” George took as big of a swig as he had when Dream was stating his obvious interests. “You choose to make things harder on yourself, then.” He hadn’t returned the glass to the counter.

Maybe he was pushing George’s limits, Dream debated speaking again, but he couldn’t for the life of him end the conversation that, for once, he had faith wasn’t going to end any time soon.

He didn’t care if it wasn’t pleasant or constructive because he had George’s attention. No matter how acidic his replies sounded, he was engaged in the conversation. And that was better than the expressionless and toneless responses.

“I don’t know what you mean.” Dream pressed.

George swallowed the swig he’d taken during Dream’s reflections. “I just think it takes a lot less effort to surrender than to fight.” He indifferently said, eyes vacant on the wall ahead.

Dream hadn’t meant to scoff, but it escaped him; his words laced with his innate fire. “Well, it’s a lot easier to fight against threats than to surrender out of laziness.”

“*Laziness*.” George’s smile was as sour as his tone. “Is that what you truly believe?”

“It’s what I’ve been taught.” Dream veered his eyes from George, mindlessly looking at the bartender who busied himself arranging drinks a few feet from where they sat. “Hence where our mentality differs.” He concluded through a mutter.

Under his breath, George repeated. “You’ve been taught.”

Dream turned his head to him, brows knitted. "Sorry?"

"It's what you've been taught." George tipped his glass towards him, Dream had then realized his brown eyes were on him; momentarily seizing the regular course of his breathing. "But is that what *you* believe in?" He quirked an eyebrow at him as he brought the rim of the glass to his lips, taking another sip; this one much lighter than the two previous ones.

Dream's eyes studied the ones that peeked past the clear glass. "I don't..." *Fucking spit it out, idiot.*

George's gaze continued to steal his attention; Dream was losing himself in the pink tint that embellished the brunet's complexion. *He looked beautiful, in a way most drunk people didn't.*

Dream's lips parted as his eyes swallowed in his features before they fell on his fleshy lips; tugged up at the corner in a passionless smirk.

Almost as if to put him out of his misery, George finally asked. "What do *you* want, Your Highness?"

But instead of ending the complexity of his tangled emotions, Dream was left with another realization; *what did he want?*

He was never asked, not in this context.

George stared for a little longer before his smirk disappeared; nothing malicious, or alluring, just amused at the confusion he almost *knew* he would cause the blonde.

The brunet's eyebrows shot up gingerly as he broke their gaze, taking another swig of his drink. Dream felt that if he didn't stop thinking, he would never speak.

Pushing his dilemmas to the side with everything he had in him, Dream asked. "Are you saying you'll never fight, Your Majesty?"

'Get in his good graces'.

That's what you came here for, Dream mentally coached himself.

George tapped off the ash from the blunt into the opened tin box. "If I could go my entire life without holding a weapon, I would." He brought the filter back to his lips, sucking on the smoking herbs.

"That's not exactly a choice that we have as royals, though, do we?" Dream almost hated the way those words sounded coming out of his own mouth.

If he listened a little closer, he could almost envision his father applauding with pride.

George took another drag, allowing the smoke to dwell before chasing it with a swig of his drink. "We do have a choice." He glanced at Dream, the blonde shifted in his seat under his stare. "It's just that the people who make the leading choices are war criminals." His eyes flickered across Dream's features, the blonde's chest rose slightly with the breath he took. "Ones who can't sit still until they start the next fight."

Dream's brows furrowed with the squint of his eyes, trying his utmost best to keep his emotions at bay. "I'm assuming you find me as a war criminal what with the way you're looking at me."

George cocked his head to the side as his wrist indolently folded with the joint he pointed in Dream's direction. "Not my words."

Dream's jaw shifted. "They might as well have been."

George sighed out the blunt smoke he had inhaled as he looked away from the blonde. "Your defensiveness is only proving my point."

"So you *do* think I'm a war criminal." Dream persisted, dismissing his father's words from earlier.

Maybe he did let his emotions get the best of him, but he lost all grip over his threshold when being wrongfully accused of being someone he was not.

"I think your father's a war criminal." George easily replied, meekly turning his head to look at Dream. "I think *you* don't have a *clue* who you are."

That had tipped Dream over the line he always seemed to dangerously balance on. Not wanting to snap at the king, however, he looked away from him.

Exacerbated silence reposed between them.

And following through with something he never thought he would, Dream hailed the bartender. His heart thumped in his chest as the man approached him with a confused smile.

"Prince Clay?"

Oh, fuck. Dream sucked in a sharp breath as the face became familiar to him.

Dream hadn't been here since the last time he came down to pick her up, but the bartender had somehow recognized him. And of course, it had to happen when he was with the king.

Dream hoped that George's disinterest towards everything would continue to uphold throughout this brief engagement; not wanting to explain how the bartender remembered him or how the man completely exposed his legal name.

A name he fucking despised.

"It's Max." The bartender put his hand out.

Dream felt a tad guilty about not remembering his name, despite the fact that they never really spoke one-on-one. Though he figured it was because of the bartender's familiarity with her.

"I never thought I'd see you sitting in my pub."

Dream forced a smile; somewhat thankful that it had diluted the anger that the king had caused him. "Uh, yeah." He chuckled uneasily, feeling more uncomfortable as he could sense George's eyes on him. "Could I...get a drink, actually?" He almost winced at his own request, how foreign it sounded teetering off his tongue.

"Sure. We still make your mo—"

"I'll have what he's having." Dream cut him off as if his life depended on it; fearing any pending reveals that he didn't want the king to know about.

Max shifted his gaze to George, Dream didn't follow the bartender's eyes; though he wanted nothing more than to know what the brunet looked like witnessing this trainwreck. At least, what

felt like a trainwreck in his mental hell.

“Are you...sure?” Max hesitantly asked as he returned his attention to Dream.

Ignoring the scoff he heard from George, Dream nodded affirmatively. Max retrieved to his station, following through with Dream’s orders.

George spoke, and for a quick moment, Dream wished it wouldn’t be in relation to anything that had just happened.

“I didn’t realize my comment would bruise your ego *that* hard.” George teasingly said, smirking against the rim of his glass as he took his second-to-last swig.

Dream couldn’t help the glare he shot his way, one that was interrupted when Max returned with his drink.

After silently thanking him, Dream’s eyes danced on the brown liquid that had gone down with ease for George.

Getting an accidental whiff of the alcohol almost made Dream gag at the perception of it on his tongue; that had edged him closer to falling off the line because this was *his* fault. Partially. It was Dream’s, too, for letting George’s opinion affect him. And that only worsened his thinning temper.

Until Dream snapped; turning on his stool so he was now fully facing George, who was still sat facing the bar. “I *know* who I am.”

George lightly flicked the bud of the joint into the tin box before turning his head to look at him. “Humour me, then.” He urged through an insensitive smile, eyes red-rimmed with the mixing effects of the alcohol and herbs swirling in his head. “Who are you?”

The hand Dream had around his glass tightened slightly; the only thing stopping him from squeezing harder being the mess following shattered glass.

“Someone that people rely on to keep them safe.” Dream started, ice glazing over his glare as he stared back at the amused brunet. “I have and *will* kill anyone to protect the ones I love. No matter how much it kills *me* to do so.” He watched the brunet’s smirk die down with the softening of his drunken eyes. “*That’s* who I am. And if all you see is a war criminal in someone that is just trying to fight for the safety of their realm, then you are a *coward*.” He spoke the last words through gritted teeth.

The king only blinked back at him, expression neutral as he stared; Dream turned in his seat, his hand moving faster than his unprocessed thoughts.

The blonde brought the rim of his glass to his lips, bracing himself before he knocked back the entire drink in one go.

The alcohol tasted like acid on his tongue, burning down his throat as his brows pinched together at the pain it physically caused him.

Until all of it disappeared in his system; sitting in his stomach, feeling as if it was burning a hole in his organs.

Don’t think about it, Dream persuaded himself as he took in a deep breath.

The silence from the brunet caused him to hesitantly look over; George had been looking at him.

“Said your *father* was a war criminal. Not you.”

Though his words stated how unaffected he was by Dream’s discourse, his brown eyes lingered on him for longer than they had that entire night.

Dream could feel a weight forming itself around his head as he continued to stare back; his eyes fluttering as they followed George’s own: scanning the blonde’s features with drunken attentiveness.

Drunk. Dream blinked himself out of the trance. *He’s looking at you with intoxicated eyes.*

And then he’s not. George returned his gaze to the counter where he drummed his ring against the glass.

As Dream followed his actions, he found himself blinking quite often, and it was then that he realized the gradual effects of the drink.

“By the way.” George’s voice seeped into his thoughts, aloof as always, but gaining the blonde’s attention—*as always*. “That drink is about to hit you like a pile of bricks.”

Dream, for the first time that night, was having a hard time keeping his eyes on the brunet. “What?”

George seemed as if he was holding back a smile. “You knocked it back like a shot.”

“You’ve...had, like,” Dream swallowed as he looked around the bar before looking back at George. “Two—*three* since I got here.”

“I’m a regular.” George derided, crossing his arms over the counter. “After a while, this starts to taste and feel like tap water.”

Dream hoped that he was just playing him, for his own sake; his brain swimming in growing delusion as he slowly replied. “What...” He licked his lips, shaking his head as if his words weren’t coming out the way he wanted them to. “How drunk...am I gonna get, exactly?”

“Depends.” George cleared his throat. “When d’you have your last drink?”

Fuck. Dream’s eyes fluttered shut, the movement faster than his brain could catch up to perceive it. “Vulcanalia.”

Re-opening them to lazily settle his darting gaze on George’s countenance, he noticed and heard the faint stifling of the brunet’s laugh. “One year ago.”

“Fuck.” Dream said, earning the king’s eyes on him in an instant. “Did I say that out loud?” He looked at him in slight horror, his lips parting as a punched-out breath escaped him.

Dream had been drunk before. But *God*, never this drunk.

His eyes were moving to focus on a spot before he could even mentally process what he was looking at.

George picked up his empty glass, clinking it with Dream’s own, which earned him the blonde’s terrified and drunken gaze. “Cheers, Prince *Clay*.”

hi!

idk what to say!

the mention of The Nether's threat is there to assure that chaos *will soon* ensue.

'ave a good night, morning, afternoon, evening. x (:

Wires

Chapter Summary

Sebastian delivers some news, getting in the middle of Dream's and George's conversation, but opening a possibility for the two of them to undoubtedly speak again.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



That drink must've been laced with something.

Dream wasn't sure when he had left George's side, or how he got to the bathroom, or how he sat at a table with the Vulcan soldiers, or how he was consuming drinks until Max announced last call, and he most certainly was *not* sure how he ended up in his bed.

What Dream was sure of was the bucket of ice-cold water being thrown onto him that following morning.

His body shot up, the water trickling down the side of his face from his dampened hair. "What the *fuck*?" His shirt stuck to his skin as uncomfortable as the soaking sheets underneath him.

"You may leave." Sebastian's voice spoke from behind his two guards before they parted, revealing the fully-dressed king, hand crossed behind his back.

The guards left, closing the door behind them.

Dream could feel his father's eyes on him, but he knew what was to come from the man's next series of words and how it would only hit him harder were he to look back.

"You know." Sebastian started and Dream could already feel his blood boiling. "For someone who is keen on reminding me that he's the next in line, you sure are tarnishing your image like no tomorrow."

Dream noiselessly sucked his teeth, shaking his head at his sheets.

"Please do intervene if you think that what I'm saying is incorrect." Sebastian coolly pressed.

Dream's eyelids flapped shut as he took in a quiet breath before placing his diluted glare on his father. "That's not what I am saying—"

"Let me paint you a picture, *Your Royal Highness*." Dream's blood went from seething hot to the cold matching the water that had been dumped onto him; his father's tone foreshadowing something he was not mentally prepared to hear at this hour. "You walk into a pub and get belligerently drunk, so much so that you can no longer perceive your own reality. So much so that *four* of *our* soldiers had to carry *your sorry ass* through the realm, pass the foyer and up the stairs to *tuck you into bed*. Like a helpless little child."

“I went into that pub to speak with King George. Like you asked me to—”

“And did you do that?” Sebastian shouted, seizing the blonde’s heart rate.

Dream turned his eyes to his covers. “I *tried*—”

“Trying is not *good* enough. You *complain* about not being informed of things and when you are, you cannot fulfil a *simple* task asked of you—”

“It wasn’t my fault—”

“Oh, for the love of *God*, you are pathetic.” Sebastian spat, speaking through a bitter chuckle, receiving Dream’s hardened gaze. “If you are going to *fuck* up, you could at least hold yourself accountable.” He stared him down, that cold, familiar repugnance accompanied by his glacial glare. “You *embarrassed* me, Clay.”

A small silence passed them; Dream tried to keep his eyes on his father’s, out of the reminder that he couldn’t display his vulnerability, but he couldn’t hold it without the loss of his trialled poise.

“I will try again—”

Cutting him off once again, Sebastian scoffed. “You will not.” He squared his shoulders and turned his back to make his way out of his son’s bedroom. “Redeem yourself by helping with the preparations for Luke’s birthday this evening.”

The covers that had been filling Dream’s palm throughout that entire conversation were released from his grip when the king was no longer in sight.

Dream dropped the back of his head against his headboard, eyes coming close with the breath he released. *Idiot*.



George was unsure of how he got from his bed to the dining table for breakfast that morning; his brain was still sloshing in the contents of alcohol mixed with Karl’s handcrafted drugs.

He was good at distancing himself from the things happening around him; residing in a safe little spot in his mind. A controlled space where he had his thoughts in boxes—places he wanted to visit, and others he steered clear of.

At the moment, as he drowned out the soldiers’ chatter and their clinking utensils, and Quackity’s loud chewing from beside him—George was going through the ‘conversation’ he shared with Prince Vulcan the night before.

Prince *Clay*.

A name he’d definitely heard before; from his mother’s praise for the Vulcan prince that was an exceptional warrior, in her eyes.

George didn’t doubt that, what he did doubt were the nice things she’d say about him; charming, lovely, and welcoming.

Where she saw charm, George saw cockiness. Where she saw welcoming, George saw caustic.

He wasn’t all bad, he was just so *obedient*. He was everything George hated about this kingdom, as well as the implemented rules for young royals to follow into their inevitable reign.

And for a split second, when the prince was justifying going into battle, George thought—you *didn't miscalculate shit*.

Until the topic of 'war criminals' came about. He hadn't defended his father. Only himself. And that had brought George back to the night he caught sight of his fixed, angry viridian eyes.

You don't like him. George smiled smugly as he brought the rim of his glass to his lips. *But he's got you caged and trained to.*

Swallowing the water like it was the last thing he wanted to drink, George wondered about the blonde; *because who would you be, were it not for your father?*

Or...when he's not watching?

Or in control?

Who are you when you're in control?

"Why are you smiling like that?" Quackity's voice ripped him out of his thoughts.

George quirked an eyebrow at him before placing his glass back onto the table. "Like what?"

"Like you're talking shit with yourself in your head?" Quackity squinted his eyes at him, shoving a forkful of his eggs into his mouth.

George smiled faintly, cocking his head to the side. "'Cause I am."

"Well, let me in on it. The fuck?" Quackity leaned forward, nosiness clear in the way his eyes widened slightly.

George's smile grew as he shook his head, briefly looking across the busy table before resettling his eyes on his friend. "Where's Karl?"

"Showering upstairs. Practice was intense." Quackity leaned back in his seat, reaching for his glass of water. "He nearly took my fucking eye out."

George lightly clicked his tongue. "Such a shame he missed."



"Niki." George breathed out upon noticing a familiar mop of bleached blonde hair at the bottom of the steps.

The three boys were upstairs following the breakfast, chatting and bantering as they did. George had gone downstairs to smoke the joint Karl had slipped him, purposely unbeknownst to Quackity who would have made sure to scold him for smoking this early in the morning.

"George!" Niki exclaimed, jogging over to him as he loped down the last couple of steps.

She jumped into his opened arms, allowing him to lift her from the ground as he gave them a half-spin before placing her back down.

"Are the boys upstairs?" She asked, her hand immediately latching onto his fringe as she brushed it away from his eyes.

George nodded, already moving past her to head outside until she placed a hand on his forearm to

stop him. He lifted an expectant eyebrow at her and she looked up at the stairs before looking back at him.

“Cole...uh.” Niki cleared her throat, looking down at the ground as she chuckled nervously.

George furrowed his eyebrows as he turned in his step to properly face her.

“I know you’re going to hate this, but.” She shook her bangs from the way it obstructed her eyesight before looking up at him. “He’s worried about you.”

George *did* hate hearing it and nothing aggravated him more, but he knew not to lash out at Niki for passing on the message; after all, getting through to George about his mother had Cole turning his son’s three friends into messenger owls.

So, George feigned a smile, composing himself as he placed two hands on Niki’s shoulders. “He doesn’t have to worry.” He leaned in, lightly knocking his forehead with hers. “And you don’t either.” He nudged the tips of their noses before his smile widened at the matching upturn on her lips. “I can tell you are.”

“Can you blame me?” Niki sighed, giving his wrist a small squeeze before he dropped his hands from her shoulders. “I know what you’re going outside for.”

“*Mhm.*” George gave her a jaunty glare before leaving her in the foyer, thoughts to herself, yet still sporting a knowing smile as she watched him walk off.



“Is there a reason as to why we actually came to this thing?” Quackity huffed as he walked past a group from the Terra realm.

Prince Luke’s birthday was being held in the Vulcan realm when usually, all events involving all the other realms, excluding festivals, were held at the common house.

George had come for two reasons, both being explained in a response to Quackity the moment the shorter had expressed his reluctance to being invited.

“First of all, we get an excuse to dress up.” Karl scoffed lightly, taking a glass of champagne from the tray, held by one of the servers upon their entrance into the Vulcan palace. “And secondly,” He tipped back his champagne glass, his shutting eyes speaking for the way his tongue relished in the taste of the expensive liquor. “It’s an open bar.”

George smiled at his extravagance, taking two glasses and passing them to Niki and Quackity before taking one for himself. The server walked past them to greet new visitors as the four progressed through the hallway and to the backcourt of the palace.

The place was booming with voices and music; much like a festival, minus all the decorations and pieces adorning the deity. Instead, this was catered to Luke’s liking, which was... *interesting*: ice statues of naked women and the veils sheathing the tents in crimson red.

“Everything is so... *red*,” Niki stated, eyes ogling at the subjectively unappealing decorations.

“That’s ‘cause that’s all they see. Have you ever seen someone from the Vulcan realm *not* on edge? These motherfuckers don’t know how to chill—”

“King of Salacia.” A voice spoke from behind the four friends.

They slightly jumped at the voice, mainly because Quackity had been talking smack and a voice that abrasive and brash could only belong to the one and only King Sebastian.

George gave him a curt nod, tipping his glass to him as if to silently greet him.

“I’m happy you could make it.” Sebastian’s grin was so feigned, in a manner that always rubbed George the wrong way. “Princess Niki, Prince Karl.” He greeted them, completely disregarding eye contact with Quackity as he muttered. “Alan.”

“It’s Alex—” Quackity corrected, but was immediately cut off.

“Make yourselves at home. Food will be served shortly.” Sebastian waved his eyes over them before departing down the steps.

The moment he was out of sight, Niki and Karl lightly shoved Quackity for not being able to keep his mouth shut. George only endearingly smiled at him because he, too, thought the exact same.



Quackity had both his arms spread out above the couch, Niki leaned into his side as they mindlessly talked about Neptunalia. Their conversation was mere background noise for the pair that were tangled up on the bean bag.

George was laying in between Karl’s legs, his back resting against the prince’s chest, his arms slung off the younger’s thighs. Karl had his arms hooked underneath George’s own so he could pass the blunt back and forth between the two of them.

Karl giggled when purposely making George chase the end of the blunt before giving in, placing the filter in between the king’s lips.

“I was telling him I didn’t want to dance, but he kept pushing—” The moment that sentence had sailed past her lips, the three boys nearly jumped from their seat; their attention instantly directed in glares placed upon Niki.

“Who?” Quackity asked through slightly gritted teeth, followed by Karl’s and George’s rebuttals:

“What the heck?”

“Who was forcing you?”

“Boys.” Niki giggled. “Simmer down. I’ve got it handled. I just wanted to tell you how desperate he was.”

That statement had eased them back into their seats; their protective demeanour dying down with how unbothered and amused she looked by the situation.

“Dude.” Karl chuckled after having blown a line of smoke into George’s parted lips. “Are you aware that Prince Clay has been staring at you this entire time?”

Quackity cackled, leaning forward as did Niki; George immediately rolled his eyes at their curiosity. “He was doing the same thing at Neptunalia, but George was brushing it off.”

George shrugged, fighting back the urge to look over at the eyes that he could sense on him from a distance.

“I mean, if you won’t go for it, George...I will.” Niki smirked, giving his knee a light nudge.

George scoffed indifferently. “Be my guest, love.”

“George, *c’mon*.” Karl swayed them side-to-side, George fought back a smile at the movement. “When was the last time you got laid?”

“Not *exactly* my top priority, given everything.” George lightly joked, but his friend seemed to have immediately retaliated with their playful and teasing glances. “Seriously?” He glanced at Quackity and Niki before looking up at Karl.

Out of the three of them, he’d expected Karl to understand the want to make jokes about a situation he hadn’t quite dealt with; that was his coping mechanism. Well, that and drowning his system in all sorts of drugs.

Letting out a defeated sigh, George untangled himself from Karl’s hold. “Gonna get a drink. You guys want anything?”

“We’re good,” Karl assured, speaking for all of them as Quackity and Niki seemed to have completely shut down.

Everyone had a different way of mourning, George just chose not to altogether. Or maybe he was but he was too fucked out of his mind to catch the reason behind his constant need to fill his liver and lungs with poison.

And for someone that finally had the occasion to feel something after not feeling for so long, he sure as hell wasn’t letting himself.



“Is King George with Prince of Terra?”

Sapnap’s spoon seized against his plate as he flickered his eyes up, looking at Dream from across the table.

The blonde kept his eyes on the scene; the way the king laid comfortably in between the legs of the chestnut-haired prince, the way he accepted the smoke transpired from his mouth as if they’d done it multiple times before.

“What the hell are you talking about, man?” Sapnap returned his attention to his food, filling his spoon with mashed potatoes.

“I’m just saying they look...rather comfortable, don’t they?” Dream wavered his eyes over them and nearly froze in his spot when he caught the eyes of Prince Karl, causing him to shoot a glare Sapnap’s way.

“*What*, dude?” Sapnap’s eyes widened in a similar manner.

“He caught me looking—”

“Who, King of Salacia?”

“No, moron. The other one—”

“Okay. Shit. Just making sure—can you *calm* down?” Sapnap furrowed his eyebrows, faint objection flashing over his expression as he looked him up and down. “Your nerves are contagious. I’m just tryna enjoy my mash.”

Dream offered him a mild, apologetic look. “Sorry. Just.” His tongue clicked against the roof of his mouth as he looked over again, catching Princess Niki’s eyes this time before he looked back at Sapnap. “Okay. They definitely know I’m looking.”

“Then stop looking, nimrod,” Sapnap said through a mouthful of mashed potatoes.

“Ew.” Dream scrunched his nose. “Chew your fucking food—”

“Yeah, I would if you stopped bothering me with your crush—”

“Keep your voice down.” Dream shot him a look before briefly glancing over the rows of soldiers occupying their table.

Sapnap’s eyes widened before he rolled them in annoyance, reposing them on his plate.

“So, but, *do you* think he’s with Prince—”

“Dream.” Sapnap dropped his spoon, sucking in a sharp breath before placing a deceiving calm look on his friend. “How the *fuck* should I know?”

“I don’t—” Dream had made the mistake of looking over once more because the moment he saw the brunet making his way over, his heart leaped in his throat. “*Shit.*”

Sapnap stifled a laugh. “Your Majesty approaches.” He said to himself, taunting Dream further.

“I’m going to...” Dream immediately began losing track of his thoughts when George approached him.

And for a brief moment, time had slowed down when they caught each other’s eyes; the brunet’s own still as blank as they always have been, but not looking away from him this time.

And in that time, Dream took him all in; a force of habit formed over the last couple of days as he knew he’d have to take as much as he could before he lost his retention once more.

And he looked the exact same as the previous days, yet still striking Dream right where it affected him most; his emotions were haywire as it played along with his heartbeat.

Drinking in his soft features, supple bronze locks tucked under and flopped over his crown, lips as fleshy and inviting as they always have been.

And those goddamn eyes; ones he could see himself in the reflection of with the offered darkness.

Until he walked past him entirely, the freeze-frame in which they held eyes crashing down around Dream, like shattering glass.

Sapnap chuckled inwardly, earning Dream’s dazed attention. “You’ve got it bad, dude.”

“I’m...gonna get water. You want some?” Dream asked, getting up from the table following Sapnap’s nod.

Just as hesitant as his steps were last night in the pub when approaching him, Dream moved towards the outside bar carefully.

“Your Majesty.” Dream started quietly, quieter than he’d like.

George looked over his shoulder before raising unfazed eyebrows. “Hey.”

'Hey.'

Dream nodded.

'Hey'?

Dream furrowed his eyebrows before joining his side. "I just wanted to—or, sorry." He shook his head, slicking his lips before starting again. "How are you?"

George's brows lifted as his lips drew up in an amused smile before he returned his attention to the bartender. "Same as earlier. Double this time, please."

Double. Dream's brows shot up lightly, entertained at the request. "I'm assuming not so well."

"Hm?" George mindlessly replied as he watched the bartender procure his drink.

"Nothing." Dream spoke under his breath before shifting his eyes from the bartender to George. "I wanted to apologize..." Earning his copper-coloured eyes on him, the blonde fought back a gulp. "...for last night."

George's brows knitted, it was enough for Dream to know he should continue.

"I, uh." Dream chuckled nervously, scarcely scratching the back of his head. "Called you a...coward."

George was undaunted by the reminder, as he had been when he initially heard it. "Oh."

"It was wrong of me." Dream's lips tightened into a lopsided frown. "I'm so sorry."

George looked down at the ground as he pursed his lips. "You shouldn't." He looked up at Dream through his lashes. "Feel sorry."

Dream let out a small breath with the tilt of his head. "I do."

"You do because I am a king." George tilted his chin up slightly. "The rules aren't as set as you find them to be, Your Highness." He drew in his bottom lip, eyes scanning the blonde's features before he spoke again. "Understand that and maybe you won't feel the often need to apologize for things you shouldn't."

And once again, George had left him in a predicament of wanting to answer but not knowing how.

And though Dream hated not having an answer or being prepared with the confidence to rebuttal, he didn't mind this coming from him. Because for once, he wasn't being looked down upon when corrected, but almost encouraged in a way that felt...*helpful*.

"Here you are, Your Majesty." The bartender slid him his drink, which George graciously took.

Without another word or look, he made his way past Dream, who was still debating whether or not, or more so how, he should answer.

"Prince of Vulcan." Dream's attention was ripped from his thoughts as his eyes locked with George's. "Out of all the things you said last night," He began and Dream braced himself. "That was the most believable."

George began making his way back to his friends, but something surged within Dream to move from where he previously stood frozen.

“Your Majesty.” He called after him and was relieved when the brunet slowed down in his tracks, glancing at his side which Dream quickly reached.

He didn’t even flinch at the fact that you called him a ‘coward’. Dream was hesitant to even keep this conversation going when he knew there was a possibility of not receiving a single worded answer in return, but he smiled down at the king when the brunet hadn’t looked away from him as quickly as he had last night.

He didn’t want to be treated like a king, Dream cleared his throat. “So.” *Address him with the assurance you have towards other royals.* “When were you going to tell me that the drink you ordered wasn’t *just* alcohol?”

And though that had derived a hidden smile from the king, an invitation to a less tense conversation in comparison to the last time they spoke, Dream was still a little nervous.

Because George was still this pretty boy with gifted features and ivory skin. And that, Dream concluded, would never fail to make his heart beat at an inexplicable rate every time he reached his attention.

“That was your choice,” George mumbled, momentarily stopping to take a sip of his drink.

Dream’s lips parted slightly as he cocked his head to the side. “You could have warned me.”

George scoffed lightly. “I don’t think—”

“Hello.” A familiar voice chimed in, almost stepping in between them as they stood face-to-face.

The giddiness in relation to where this conversation could have gone seized the moment Dream met eyes with his father’s.

And for the first time ever, Dream was now the one avoiding all eye contact with George, though he could sense the brunet’s eyes teetering between him and his father.

“Sorry, I hate to intrude.” Sebastian chuckled easily, a sound that was familiar to Dream because of how pretended it was. “King George, I was wondering if I could speak with you in private. Not so in private, I suppose.” He slid in another fake laugh. “Your father is waiting in my office as we speak, actually.”

George tore his eyes off Dream the moment the blonde looked over at him; it was as if he felt ashamed, standing as the intruding man’s son and looking into the pretty boy’s eyes. But now he could, now that George placed his eyes on Sebastian; nothing short of a blank glare.

“What for?” George’s voice contrasted with Sebastian’s; almost easing Dream’s nerves with the calmness of his tone.

“It is business-related. To a certain extent.” Sebastian grimaced through his last few words.

Dream noticed the slight annoyance that George unveiled through his constant facade of unbothered. One could almost assume that it seemed as though the brunet had no choice but to abide, due to his status as a ruler of a realm.

“Clay, guide us through. And then you can return to Nick and Luke at the table.” Sebastian stated coolly, stepping aside to let Dream guide them.

And the moment Dream had gone to take a step, *he* spoke. “Shouldn’t he be joining us?” George’s

eyes were empty, but somehow still demanding as they continued to dance upon Sebastian's countenance. "Seeing as this is a business meeting and he's your next in line."

Oh, fuck. Dream felt a cold flash rush through him as he looked *anywhere* except his father; the ground, the busied tents, the pretty brunet that just stepped up to a man who could annihilate both their existence with one simple glance.

But he wasn't scared, Dream's jaw clenched as he studied George's fixed stare on Sebastian. *George wasn't looking away from him.*

His father was obviously not fighting back because he had to kiss up to George's ass; his initiative clearly deriving from how Dream failed to do his task last night. This was him doing damage control, but *still*.

Dream heard his father take a breath to answer, but George was the one to step aside this time. "Would you guide us to your office, then, King Sebastian?"

You're not breathing. Dream let out an imperceptible, quiet breath.

Sebastian forced a smile, crossing his hands behind his back. "Certainly."



George's reasons for having come here had always been three instead of two. Part of him wanted to complete the equation, find the missing variables to figure out the relationship between the Vulcan father and son.

But he was also just *bored*. The drugs and alcohol were no longer helping him escape as he'd hope. Following his friend's reaction to his meek joke, he was once again reminded of his reality. And how *she still wasn't here*.

So, George looked for distractions. And he was able to find that the moment he met eyes with King of Vulcan; and the obvious distaste he had towards his son.

And George, with the undeniable need to be a pest for his own entertainment and distraction, decided to jump in where it didn't concern him.

It was still interesting, George wondered why Prince of Vulcan was so obedient to him when it was clear he just bossed him around.

While following behind King Sebastian, the prince in tow, George wondered *what* this meeting could possibly be about. Especially with no other rulers within sight.

And as much as he didn't want to, *he had no fucking choice*.

Because this was part of it, wasn't it? The gradual downgrade of his freedom; firstly being forced to sit at the head of the table for breakfast, secondly, attending business meetings.

Cole greeted him when he stepped inside the office, George gave him a curt nod before briefly analyzing the room; everything was so dark—dark furniture, weapons as the main inspiration for decorations.

"Please." Sebastian motioned for the seat next to Cole as he walked past George to get to his desk.

George purposely took a seat on his father's armrest instead, leaning his elbows onto his parted

knees as he carelessly looked to the side.

He could feel the king's eyes on him as the man took a seat at his desk, but George couldn't find it in him to care.

Admittedly, George had no reason to hate the guy. He just hated his morals and beliefs, which wasn't enough to be disrespectful, but he also *didn't owe* respect to anyone, regardless of their title.

It was as he had told the prince moments earlier; essentially, from his perspective, rules were optional.

"God, I don't even know where to begin." Sebastian sighed, running a hand through his hair as his eyes scattered over his desk.

George fought back an eye roll as he unintentionally looked over at the prince, standing compliant behind and to the side of his father's chair.

They caught each other's eyes for a moment; George brought the rim of his glass to his lips, finishing his drink in one swig before disposing of the glass onto Sebastian's desk, knowing very well that the droplets of water cascading down the glass would pool into a circle on the man's table.

George watched Dream's eyes flicker to the action before they went to his father, almost as if he was awaiting a reaction until he placed them back onto the brunet. George couldn't help the small tug at the corner of his lips that seemed to have mirrored onto the blonde's.

Just as presumed, Sebastian leaned over and slid a coaster under George's glass; causing the two younger men to deflect their dancing smiles to the ground.

Mission accomplished.

It was so clear that he was trying his best not to snap, George's eyes played at the floorboards; King of Vulcan wasn't exactly the warmest person he knew.

So, George wondered how much further he could push him, and he began working on ideas—distracting himself the best he could since the drink hadn't done that for him—until Sebastian spoke.

"Cole. I suppose you should start, with what we already spoke about."

George's brows knitted, not quite looking up as he anticipated his father's voice.

"It's about...your mother." Cole started through a strained voice, immediately gaining George's eyes on him. "She didn't pass in battle, George. She was k—" His words were caught in his throat, eyes diverging to the ground, keeping them there. "She was...killed."

Out of all the moments in which George had been knocked out of his intoxication, this was the bluntest of hits.

"What," It was less so a question than the spoken statement of his sheer confusion laced with shock. "You said you *watched* her take her last breath—"

"We *thought* she died off that cliff, but." Sebastian chimed in, the words seeming to lag on his tongue as he dodged eye contact. "She was only severely injured. Taken from us without our

knowledge.”

There were a million thoughts running through George’s head and none of them were being processed because all he could think about was; *maybe you’d have a slight fucking clue what was going on if you were there.*

Coward. Coward. Coward.

George veered his eyes to the ground before screwing them shut. “How...do you know this?”

A silence passed, one that was much needed; no ushering words or impatience exuded from neither Cole nor him.

A paper was being unfolded from ahead; Sebastian slipped it across his desk before turning it over so George could have a look. Upon no reaction, Cole reached for it; reading over the words before the brunet heard a punched-out breath past his father’s lips.

“The Mind was working with The Nether?”

“They had always been in contact.” Sebastian reclined in his seat with a huff. “The Nether had actually initiated our last battle with The Mind, they were just counting on them to distract us from their main objective.”

“To take Anthea from us,” Cole spoke through a worked sigh before flinging the letter back onto Sebastian’s desk.

George reached for the letter and read over it through prickling tears, ones he held back despite his desperate need to unleash them; due to his anger, with himself and with the people that were responsible for his mother’s absence.

“This was addressed to *you*,” George spoke through slightly gritted teeth as he placed his glare onto Sebastian. “The day you returned from battle—” He felt Cole’s warning grip on his forearm, but he couldn’t stop the words from flying out of his mouth. “How long were you going to keep this to yourself for? Why the *hell* was this addressed to you and not us?”

She was my mother. George wanted to say as he felt his grip tighten around the letter. *We should have been warned.*

Ever since finding out about the news, George hadn’t allowed himself to mourn.

George was in the waiting room of the grieving stages; lounging about in isolation and denial; herbs and alcohol wiring his system to unresponsiveness when she would be mentioned.

And the letter serving as an eviction notice imposed his guilt; *guilt for having not been there when he should have.* Until he was kicked out into the next room; painted taunting red as his anger flourished, the colours reflecting onto his eyes which he bore into Sebastian.

A man who he knew his mother trusted as her partner in battle.

As much as George couldn’t stand him for his own reasons, he was just trying to help. And he knew that, but it was easier to put the blame on somebody than to take responsibility for the surplus of liability rushing through him.

“You guys were in mourning.” Sebastian’s voice was contained, quiet. “We didn’t want to impose another problem.”

George ripped his eyes off him before ridding of the letter onto the mahogany desk.

“And I don’t know why it was addressed to me, out of all the rulers. I suppose they knew that I would take initiative a lot faster than Queen Victoria and Queen Felicity.” Sebastian leaned forward, crossing his arms over his desk as he searched for George’s eyes; continuing despite knowing he wouldn’t attain them. “And I *want* to take initiative. I want to avenge your mother, King George.”

George’s eyes flashed up to him and he was in limbo.

One end denoting the initiation of battle and how he didn’t want to encourage it. The other end intending the possibility of avenging his mother.

Because you weren’t there to stop it. George thought as his eyes wavered over Sebastian’s determined glare. *And this is your chance to do something about it.*

Sebastian dropped his eyes as he took in a deep breath. “Your Majesty,” He began, formulating his words before redirecting his eyes onto the brunet. “The Nether is undoubtedly one of the strongest realms. I am *not* hesitant in the fact that we could beat them, but they do have an advantage over Vulcan and Terra.” He cleared his throat, straightening up slightly. “But not over Euris and Salacia. The limitation of their power is when they’re up against air and water. So,” He pushed himself off his crossed arm, his chair emitting a creak underneath his weight. “You say the word and I will inaugurate battle.”

Feeling as if he was being pressed for an answer at that very moment, George couldn’t bear to look at his father or Sebastian. And for a reason unbeknown to him, his eyes drew up to the prince.

In a calming sea of moss, George lost himself in search of how to respond. And he who had once been a stranger to him gave him an imperceptible shrug.

The gloss in eyes had George in a further predicament, but he couldn’t care to figure out why the prince seemed so shocked and breathless at the news; this didn’t necessarily concern him.

Turning his attention back to the war criminal, George saw himself as an enabler in his reflection, were he to give him the green light.

But he could almost see the shifting gears in Cole’s head, and his thumping heart through his chest, and if he looked a little closer, George could see his mother maneuvering around the practice room, working endless hours to keep *them* safe.

And in words he never thought he’d utter out, through years and years of self-taught hatred towards the war-like mentality every ruler held, George nearly whispered. “Okay.”

Sebastian had nearly jumped in his seat but seemed to have settled for a sigh of relief, at the same time that George heard the prince let out a deep breath; one that wasn’t similar in nature.

“Gr—Great.” Sebastian lightly slapped his palms against his desk. “We will be holding a meeting tomorrow. Discussing the battle plan and...” He trailed off as he glanced between Cole and George. “I mean...if that’s not too soon.”

George stood up from the armrest, picking up his glass from the coaster. “Everything is *too* soon, King Sebastian.”

And not another word was spoken as he made his way out of the king’s study, Cole seeming completely spaced out as he followed behind his son.



From the moment Sebastian had mentioned George's mother, Dream knew something wasn't right, and it had him unsettled throughout the entire conversation.

Because why had Sebastian told him that it was a threat from The Nether instead of their admittance to having killed Queen Anthea?

His broiling anger continued to surge as he watched his father feign his empathy towards the situation when he caught a glimpse of the letter; how the format seemed oddly familiar.

And as much as George and Cole were eating this up, Dream knew better.

"King of Salacia!" Dream ran after him shortly after dismissing himself from his father's office.

George slowed in his steps, Cole seemed to have looked over before he checked in on his son; a muted understanding was transpired before he left the both of them in the halls of the Vulcan palace.

Dream's echoed footsteps dialled down as he neared the king, who slowly turned on his spot to face him; eyes not quite resting on him.

"Are you..." Dream took in a deep breath before sighing out his question. "Are you okay?"

George flickered his gaze up to him; stoic, yet clearly battling with his own thoughts, the brunet nodded.

Dream drew in his bottom lip before tilting his head to the side. "I'm so sorry."

George diverted his empty stare to the ground, pocketing his hands. Dream was met with the top of his chocolate locks, crowned in gold and crystals.

"Stop apologizing." If Dream wasn't always listening out for him, he would've barely picked up on his voice.

And he wanted to say; *'I'm not apologizing because I have predetermined honour for a king, but because my father's an asshole'*, but Dream knew better than to unsheath that. Especially in the state that the king was in, despite his ongoing facade.

"Right." Dream cleared his throat, allowing a small silence to envelop their proximity. "You just..." He bit his lip to hold back his impulse, but realizing that he had already begun and had earned the king's eyes, he continued. "You must feel like—" *Shit*. "You must feel awful. *This* is awful."

George paused for a moment before tilting his chin up slightly. "Yeah? The fuck do you know?"

Like a scorpion bite to his core, Dream's demeanour fell in an instant. He still felt sorry for him, but it was then that the blonde realized he had no idea of his own mother's passing.

George's eyes fluttered to the space between them, almost as if he had regretted his own words. And then he turned on his heel, leaving Dream in the hallway; conflicted as he always did.

And the moment George was out of sight, a rush of anger coursed through Dream when reminded of why he had been apologizing in the first place.

He stalked back to his father's office, pushing the door open before slamming it behind him.

“What the *fuck* is your problem?”

Sebastian stared back; expression unreadable. “I beg your pardon?”

“That’s his *mother*.” Dream spat, his throat aching with bottled rage. “You think I couldn’t tell that letter was pure bullshit?” Sebastian rose from his seat, but the blonde continued fearlessly. “You forged the fucking letter.”

“Clay. You need to calm down this very moment.” Sebastian walked around his desk, making his way over calmly.

“You’re ready to go to any lengths to get what you want, but this is *fucked*. They haven’t even properly mourned her yet. And you’re using that to your advantage just so you can take over The Nether.” Dream continued, his chest screaming as it continued to burn up in flames.

“You need to shut your mouth,” Sebastian spoke through the barings of his teeth, standing fixed before his son.

“There was never a threat, was there?” Dream shook his head, his breath ragged as he simmered down. “You just needed them to fight by your side.”

“Yes,” Sebastian admitted. “And maybe I wouldn’t *have* to go through those lengths if you had just done your *job*.”

“No.” Dream chuckled bitterly, shaking his head. “You’re not putting this on me.”

“Oh, but I am.” Sebastian smiled menacingly. “If you had been able to convince him, I wouldn’t have had to do this. So, if you’re *ever so* worried about King George’s feelings, just know that it was all you.” He placed two hands, jacketing Dream’s face as the younger nearly trembled with unease at the touch. “*This is all you.*”

Dream’s breath was stuttering through his quivering lips, jaw tense as he fought back the tears; the ache in his throat going through rage to restraint as he caged his vulnerability.

Sebastian tightened his grip around Dream’s face so the blonde was forced to lock eyes with him. “You always mess everything up, Clay. Never forget that.”

Chapter End Notes

now with the basis out of the way, we can get on to the good shit. let's goooo.

thank u, silent and non-silent readers. appreciate yous.

night, morning, evening, afternoon. hope you're all well x

Ribs

Chapter Summary

George spends his entire night in a drug-addled trance, going through the motions of his suppressed feelings following his mother's death and the inauguration of battle, almost as if he knew it would be his last hurrah as a king who had yet to hold a weapon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



George was still in limbo of wanting to feel alive and craving death, but from the moment Sebastian had got him to inaugurate the battle for the avenging of his mother, a lot of repressed things resurfaced.

Suddenly, George wanted nothing less than numbness.

He kept his composure, bidding his friends ‘goodnight’ and dismissing their attempts in joining him back home when it was clear they were enjoying the event. Cole seemed worried to let George return back to Salacia on his own, but the man was also sorting through his own thoughts to think about stopping his son.

And maybe he should have stopped him because the moment George returned to the palace, he wasted no time in stripping out of his suit to sport something a little more casual so he could hit the second place that felt closest to home.

The pub.

The afternoon sky turned dark by the time George was no longer able to distinguish people’s voices from music. Or objects from humans. Sitting at a booth surrounded by others whose names he didn’t care to catch, George had lost all concept of time.

And his eyes began fluttering shut. And he thought, *he could really sleep right now, were it not for a certain voice that ripped him out of his pending need to be unconscious.*

“King of Salacia?”

Out of all the voices he failed to recognize that night, for some reason, that was the only one he could. “Starting to think you’re stalking me, Your Highness.”

George’s voice sounded like a faint buzzing in his own head as he looked up from across the table; he blinked a couple of times because the blonde seemed like a blurred blob in the state of mind he was currently in.

“Can’t you see he can barely speak?” The blonde’s question wasn’t directed to him, but to the person next to George; someone’s weight who he could scarcely feel on him, but hadn’t exactly been actively aware to push them off. “So maybe test your chances another night.”

The weight George had only begun accustoming himself to lifted off his limbs; he watched through lidded eyes as the stranger exited the booth, leaving an empty spot beside him.

Chatter could be heard on his left, but the brunet returned his attention to the prince the best he could. “Are you—” He hiccupped, sliding up in his seat so he could straighten his posture, but to no avail; his hands slipped from underneath him. “*Pft.*” He giggled, his head heavy as it lulled forward, his fringe flopping past his eyes. “What...” He tapped his head, a small pout forming on his lips.

“It’s on the table. In front of you.” The prince coolly stated.

George lifted his eyes from his lap and it immediately landed on his crown; sat comely next to his empty drink. “Oh.” He lazily smiled before his eyes drew up to the prince. “So...you stalking me, then?”

“I was actually coming here to return some cases of unopened champagne bottles to Max. Turns out we overestimated for Punz’s birthday.” The blonde took the liberty of taking a seat next to him, yet George didn’t fail to notice the fair bit of distance he left between the two of them.

George’s brows knitted. “What *the fuck* is a ‘Punz’?”

“Luke—he’s my brother. Sorry.” The prince corrected.

George let out a deep huff, letting his back harshly hit against the backrest of the booth. “Sorry this, sorry that—do you know *any* other words?” He slurred, head rolled back so his eyes darted across the ceiling.

“I do. Doubt you’d be able to decipher them in the state you’re in right now, though.”

George’s head rolled to the side, his eyes latching onto the prince’s countenance; the blonde sported a half-smirk and the brunet—though completely decimated—couldn’t help but pick up on the switch in his demeanour.

“Better.” George nodded slowly. “Much better.”

The prince cocked an eyebrow. “What is?”

George rolled his eyes, not wanting to *talk*. That’s all everyone wanted to do today and it was driving him insane. *Couldn’t everyone just shut the fuck up?* His eyes fluttered shut with a sigh that escaped past his lips.

“I, uh.” The prince began and George hoped that the copious amounts of alcohol continued to pound his system so he would have the patience to endure whatever was to come next. “I did want to talk about something though.”

“Talk, talk, talk.” George’s tongue lightly clicked as he continued to rest the back of his head on the booth, eyes shut on the ceiling above. “That’s all we ever do.”

A shitty song continued to pass through the speakers, swirling in with even shitter conversations happening around them.

“Well.” The prince began, his voice seeming a little closer now than it was before; a small part of George wondered if he’d shuffled closer to him. “That’s how people have conversations, no?”

George exhaled through his nose, lightly shaking his head; his scalp uncomfortable as it grazed

against the hardwood. "I'm tired of talking."

He wasn't sure, but George could have sworn he heard a small chuckle from the prince as he answered. "How do you suggest we have a conversation without talking, Your Majesty?"

George licked his lips, easing the dryness from his dehydration before he lazily rolled his head to the side; his eyes fluttered open as he looked at the blonde through a lidded gaze.

He wasn't sure if it was the alcohol dancing in his veins, or the drugs poisoning his brain, but it seemed as if everything had gone silent the moment the prince stared back.

And though the lighting was barely noticeable from where they sat, George saw the growth in his pupils and he remembered the first night he saw them under the starry skies: light green with a twinge of blue, always sporting a little bit of gloss.

George's eyes shifted to the blonde's lips, admiring the way the plush skin parted with the small breath he took. *You look the furthest thing from someone who's got fire running through their soul*, he thought as he directed his eyes back to his. *You look fragile*.

But the reason George hadn't said anything was to possibly see if he'd understood. Understood that sometimes conversations could be had through brief eye contact.

"I just told you everything I'm thinking of." George finally said.

The prince blinked back as if George's voice lured him back to reality.

Pausing for a moment, he watched the blonde's eyes scatter across his features before he caught them again. "I think..." He cleared his throat. "I think the only thing I got from that is that you're really sad."

A brief scoff through a drunk smile stitched George's lips. "Close enough."

The blonde's expression fell in an instant; empathy clear in the way the corner of his lips drew down a tad bit. "I'm—"

"If you say 'sorry'." George warningly said before he began fighting a smile that had mirrored itself onto the prince's expression, effacing the frown he previously wore.

But his sheepish smile hadn't lasted long when he kept his eyes on the brunet. "I *am* sorry, but...not for what you're thinking." He seemed hesitant, scared even; George was almost sobering up the longer he stared back trying to understand.

Shit. He blinked at him. *Maybe he wasn't in the right state of mind to decipher what the prince was saying after all*.

"George." A docile voice called out through a relieved sigh.

Through all unrecognizable voices and the singular recognizable one, George didn't even have to *look* to know who had called for him.

Niki. His eyes flew up to hers as she placed her hands onto the sticky table, leaning forward to speak with him. "Darling, what the *hell* do you think you're doing?" She asked through an amused smile.

George contained a similar reaction, but it was near-impossible around her. "Getting smashed.

You?”

Niki playfully rolled her eyes before they fell onto the man, sort of in the middle of their engagement. “Your Highness.” She tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear before gingerly sticking her hand out. “I liked your party.”

Flirt. George hung his head, directing his knowing smile to his lap.

“I will pass that onto Luke. Thank you.” The prince shook her hand.

Niki tenderly released his hand before motioning hers to George. “I will be taking him off your hands now. Apologies...” She began as the blonde slid out of the booth. “...for the things he’s said or done in my absence.” She continued, playfully glaring at George before grabbing his hand over the table to help him out of the booth.

They both giggled as he staggered out of the tight space before finally reaching her side.

“No need.” The prince spoke through a chuckle. “He was pleasant.”

“You don’t have to lie to her.” George rolled his eyes, hooking his arm around Niki’s shoulders before glancing up at the prince.

“It’s true. We’re all aware that he’s a real pain in the ass.” The slip-up with the mild curse word had taken them both aback slightly before the blondes shared a laugh. “I hope to see you soon, Prince of Vulcan. Have yourself a good night.”

“Likewise—*oh*.” The prince stopped them mid-turn as they both looked at him expectantly; George’s eyes fell onto the shiny object hooked around his hand. “Surely you’re not leaving this behind.” He passed the crown to him, giving him a curt nod. “Your Majesty.”

It had been the last thing George audibly registered before Niki helped him out of the pub, the air harsh against his skin, nearly knocking the intoxication out of his system.

“He is *so* into you.” Niki giggled as the doors closed behind them.

George let out a grunt, leaning into her side as the hand dangling off her shoulder locked with hers for support. “You’re so annoying.” He slurred.

“I thought you said I could go for it and here you are, sharing drinks and holding eye contact for an *unbelievable* amount of time.” Niki chuckled, guiding them through the streets of the village.

“What the fu—how long were you in there for—”

“Solid five minutes.”

“*Why?*” George nearly tripped over a rock were it not for Niki’s firm grip around his waist.

“Karl and I saw you speaking with him when you’d gone to grab a drink? At the party?” Niki wavered her gaze over him, and for a moment George looked at her before quickly diverting his eyes ahead. “And the look on your face you had, then, was the same one you held a few moments before I had interrupted you two.”

George nearly laughed, but couldn’t manage more than a scoff. “Go on, then. Explain this ‘look’ to me.”

Niki huffed, still sporting a smile as she did a once-over of the village. “Hm, I don’t know.” She

mused, eyes cast over the gravel before she perked up, a light laugh escaping past her red lips. “Oh my God. I’ve got it.” She sputtered an indifferent chuckle before continuing. “It’s that same look you have when you’re annotating those novels you’re fond of.” She stated proudly until she noticed the kink in his eyebrow. “Like, when you’re trying to demystify something into your own words. Into your own interpretation. You know, because you always seem to think you know better than the source.”

“It’s ‘cause I do. Know better.” George muttered, earning a light nudge in his side.

The wind coursing through the streets of the village saturated their silence for a moment.

“Does Cole know of my whereabouts?”

Niki sighed. “Mhm.”

George squeezed his eyes shut, mentally cursing himself. “And Quackmeister?”

Niki grimaced as she looked up at him. “...Yeah. He was going to pick you up, but...I held him back.” Though she didn’t have to expand on why, she concluded; almost as if it to rub it in, though it was never her intention. “I figured it’s best he *doesn’t* cause a scene in the middle of the pub.”

“Yeah...” George trailed off, chewing on his bottom lip.

They hadn’t really spoken about his mother’s absence, him and Niki. Quite honestly, the four of them had yet to speak to each other about it, but it seemed as if none of them desired the role of the initiator.

George, figured, however; in the inexplicable amount of alcohol and smoked herbs numbing his brain that he could maybe tell her about Sebastian’s news. And how it was fucking with him, but also further vexing his father. And how, George knew, coming back home in the state he was in, would only make current matters worse.

“Cole told us.” Niki breathed out shakily, breaking George from his thoughts.

George thought this was the worse kind of crossed; he felt high and drunk, but his thought process was dead sober. And that was simply so much worse than being stone-cold sober: having a taste of escape, but not quite evading the pain of reality.

“It’s okay, George. I don’t blame you.” Niki sighed, a gust of mist pushing past her lips as she squeezed his waist. “I just worry about you.”



Niki wasn’t coming back inside. *That* heightened George’s nerves as he lingered on the steps of the palace.

What is your problem, he thought as he ran both sets of his fingers through his hair. When did you start giving a shit?

George pocketed his hands, taking in a deep breath. *They can’t be angry. You have your reasons. Valid ones.* He readied himself, walking up the stairs and missing one step as the alcohol continued to jeopardize his vision.

Walking as quietly as possible, given the time and the fact that everyone in this palace was sound asleep, George made his way towards the large staircase. And making the small mistake of

quicken his steps, the brunet slipped.

And for the first time that night, in all the moments he could have tripped over and fallen, it had to have been when he was right next to *the* statuette.

George had heard and seen some pretty horrifying things in his life, but that had got to be the worse.

What was once an expensive, almost priceless, crystallized sculpture of his mother's portrait, had now become tiny little pieces of broken glass onto the marbled floor.

George's jaw went slack as he stared down in horror, eyes glossing with every growing second.

"You can't be serious."

George hadn't even acknowledged the person in the room until they'd spoken, his eyes flying straight up to Cole's as his heart continued to ache painfully in his chest.

"Father—"

"Stop." Cole clasped his hand over his mouth, eyes unable to keep at the broken pieces as he glared at his son before dropping his hand. "Do you *realize* what you've done?"

"It was a mistake," George whispered shakily before swallowing. "You have to believe me. I was being really careful—"

"This needs to stop. *Now*." Cole spoke through gritted teeth; eyes filled with tears and rage.

"What?" George breathed out.

"The *drinking*, the *drugs*—it all ends now. Am I *understood*, George?"

Maybe it was the addendum of the unfixable statuette, but the way Cole had raised his voice at him rendered George speechless. It wasn't the first time he'd gotten yelled at, but this was the first time it had affected him.

But he obliged, despite not registering the weight of the request. And drunk and not able to think straight, George had gone to pick up the pieces, but his father dismissed him to his room.



"What was all that ruckus for?" Quackity's voice spoke from his doorway.

George was just stepping out of his bathroom, towel hanging off his shoulder; the waistband of his black briefs peeking through the white of his loosely tied bathrobe.

"Don't know what you're on about," George mumbled, tongue still tied from the slow recovery of his intoxication.

George kept his head down, walking towards his wardrobe as he ignored Quackity's presence. He had already and somewhat dealt with his dad's wrath for something he felt he didn't need to apologize for.

The statuette, he understood. It had been a clear mistake, though. A misstep. He was clumsy and he wanted to argue that it could have happened whether or not he was under the influence.

But reminded of the look on his father's face, George figured he shouldn't argue. Not tonight, at least.

Hence his reluctance in wanting to continue this conversation between him and Quackity.

George returned from his wardrobe, sporting his sweatpants, his upper half amiss the warmth of a shirt.

Nearly rolling his eyes at the sight of Quackity sat at the edge of his bed, George pretended to occupy his attention with his piano. "The fuck are you still doing here?"

"Something obviously happened," Quackity spoke calmly, but George could hear the impatient anger in his tone. "Why don't you just tell me?"

Something tells me you already know, George wanted to say as he leaned his hip into the oak of his piano. "Can you drop it?" He finally settled his eyes on his friend, arms crossed over his chest.

"No, actually." Quackity pressed, poking that curtain screening George's temper.

One that only Quackity could attain so easily, and always in the worse times.

In sharing the same space for so many years, Quackity had actually become somewhat of a brother to him. And like brothers, they fought. Sometimes silent treatments were in order over petty things, but other times—much less frequent in occurrence—the silence lasted days.

"Get out." George pushed himself off his piano, turning away from him as he walked towards his bookshelf. "M'not asking twice."

"I'm not leaving."

George seized in his steps before taking a breather, one that didn't aid the drop of the curtains. He turned vastly on his heel, stalking towards Quackity. But before he could even execute anything, the younger had him shoved to the ground.

And not that he could have withstood the push was he sober, but George stumbled easily with the lack of energy in his body.

"What did you think you were gonna achieve, tough guy?" Quackity knelt down, levelling their eyes. "Look at you right now."

George ground his jaw, sucking in a sharp breath. "*Don't* piss me off."

"I'm worried about you," Quackity concluded through a worked sigh.

George rolled his head back. "If I hear that shit *one more time*—"

"So, what, you're drinking by yourself now?" Quackity asked as George forced himself from the ground, avoiding eye contact.

George turned away from him, walking in an opposite direction with no destination in mind; he just knew he needed to get away from him.

"That's a thing you're doing?" Quackity urged, walking after him.

"Wasn't a problem before, why the sudden interest?" George muttered, picking up a book from the shelf to feign his attention elsewhere.

“Why the sudden—motherfucker,” Quackity grappled his elbow, yanking him around so George was forced to face him. “It’s *one* thing to get fucked up with your friends every night, but the fact that you’re so dependant on alcohol that you’re willing to go down there by yourself when no one else can *assist* you...” He shook his head, hand tightening when George tried to escape his grip. “...what the fuck is happening with you?”

George yanked his elbow out of his grip with a fierceness that had Quackity taking a small step back. “Quackity.” He began through slightly gritted teeth before taking a small breath. “I have nothing left to fight for.” He took a step forward, the raven-haired boy tried to stay still. “My mother was *killed*.” His voice unexpectedly rose, earning a blink of awareness from the younger. “My freedom is being *caged*.” He took another step, this time, Quackity moved back. “So, *please*.” He huffed out heavily, leaning in slightly. “Let me have this *one fucking thing*.”

There was a small pause in which Quackity shifted his eyes to the side, registering George’s words while the brunet stared, trying his best to maintain his composure.

“You act...as if we also haven’t lost Anthea,” Quackity spoke under his breath.

George’s eyes rolled to the back of his head as he shut his book, tossing it onto the piano. “Congrats for being more mentally stable than I am.” He spat, ducking his chin so as to obtain Quackity’s gaze. “D’you want a fucking medal?”

“George—“

“You *assholes*—you want me alive? Well, here I fucking am.” George exclaimed with spread arms before dropping them to his sides when he received the shorter’s scowl. “But I can’t *do that* without a little help.”

Quackity’s features churn with half disgust and hurt. “Who the fuck am I to you, huh?” He started and George pulled back from having leaned in. “Who’s Cole to you? Niki? Karl?”

George let out a bitter chuckle as he pushed past him. “Don’t.”

“You’re practically saying drugs are the only thing keeping you alive.” Quackity turned around, George’s back to him as he continued fiercely. “But once you’ve lost control over it, it’s gonna be the first thing that kills you.” The brunet stopped in his tracks, his eyes fluttering shut when he could feel that the other was not done. “And you’ve lost control, George.”

George pinched the bridge of his nose, inhaling quietly. “Leave, Quackity.”

“I understand—“

“No, you fucking don’t—“

“You say drugs ease the pain of living, I *get* that.” Quackity cut him off, seizing all interruptions from the brunet. “It’s your life, it’s your decision.” He resumed, his voice dying down with unmeasured breaths before he defeatedly said. “But please don’t make me feel selfish for wanting to keep you alive.”

George turned around. “I’m not—“

Without a single look, Quackity made his way out of his room before uttering. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Each blade of the ceiling fan, intertwined in vines, spun lightly; aerating the room of the Terran prince as he sat on his bed, back against his headboard and drawing pad in his hand.

The lead of his B4 pencil smudged a streak onto the side of his palm, causing the tip of his pencil to halt in its shading process.

Karl let out an annoyed, but unfazed sigh as he lightly tossed his notebook to the side. His eyes flickered up to the spinning, wooden blades; lulling him into memory until the sound of the animating portal succeeded his attention.

Through tall french windows, raindrops trickling down the moss-dabbed vitrine, Karl spotted his mother; luggage surrounding the young woman sporting her staple fish-tail braid, flowers punctured in the crevices and wearing those big, clear glasses.

“Mom,” Karl spoke through a punched-out breath before he began lightly tapping the window.
“Mom!”

Looking up, nose scrunched at the dewdrops that began peppering her nose, Felicity’s jaw dropped.

Through thick walls and from where she stood, Karl was still able to make out his name; a grin growing on his face when he noticed the way she jumped up and down, waving frantically at him.



“Thank you for the tea, baby.” Felicity walked into the kitchen, drying her rain-soaked hair with a hand towel.

Karl waved her off. “You just got back from a long trip and all the staff are asleep. It’s the least I can do.” He lifted the kettle from its station, pouring the steaming water into the bamboo mug as he watched the tea leaves dance in the ascending water. “I didn’t tell anyone where you were, by the way.”

The wooden stool creaked under Felicity when she situated herself at the kitchen island; legs brought to her chest as she wrapped her arms around them. “And I love you for that.” She huffed, resting her chin on her knee.

Karl joined her at the wooden island shortly after, hand nursing the steaming mug before setting it down. “Careful. It’s steaming hot.”

“Yeah. I can see that, genius.” She said through a playful smirk before lightly jutting an elbow into his side.

Karl giggled, slapping her arm away as he seated himself on the stool beside her. “I was lying when I said I missed you.”

Felicity playfully scoffed, eyes widening before she rolled them. “*Okay*, bud.”

The rain continued to shower down on the palace, the impact of the drops sounding only against the tall windows glassing the kitchen. The room was dimly lit through candles, certain features a lot less distinguishable than it would be were the saucer lights on.

“How was it?” Karl asked after a while, voice quiet to mediate with the rain outside.

Felicity pursed her lips, offering a small shrug.

“She was your best friend, mom. I can’t even...I can’t even imagine.” Karl’s eyes fluttered with the threatening tears as he hesitantly stared back at her.

“She always will be.” Felicity sighed, bringing her eyes to her son, forcing a small smile. “The trip...helped, to a certain extent. I kept thinking, if she were looking down at me right now, watching me sulk and hiding away, she would kick my ass.” Earning a light laugh from her son, she continued through a sad smile. “And though I don’t think I’ll ever get over this. Or that anyone will...” She whispered shakily. “...mourning is a process that comes in waves, isn’t it? We just have to hope that the crash against the shore lessens in its harshness as time passes.”

The blue of his irises shone through as he deflected his gaze to the candle burning at the center of the island. “Uhm.” He cleared his throat. “Cole says ‘Hi’, by the way.”

“Good God.” Felicity breathed out, features scrunched when remorse washed over. “I feel terrible for leaving him. And them.” She referred to Karl’s friends through a simple look. “And you. Oh my God, I shouldn’t have—”

“Mom. Mom. Mom.” Karl hushed, placing comforting hands onto her shoulders. “Don’t do that to yourself right now.”

“*Fuck.*” She cursed under her breath, blinking her eyes up. “I wasn’t there for his coronation.”

Karl dropped his hands from her shoulders, resting one arm on the counter beside him as he chuckled lightly. “Neither was he.”

Felicity’s eyes widened. “He didn’t go?”

“No, no. He did.” Karl reassured through a light smile. “Just...” He huffed out a mild laugh. “...mentally, he was *not* there.”

Felicity caught on in a nano-second; having been there to witness George’s unravelling addictions and hearing it through Anthea’s distress, worry began etching itself across her expression.

“Hey.” Karl placed one hand on her knee, giving it a tight squeeze. “If you start worrying about him, you’ll never stop—”

Felicity’s jaw went slack. “I’m the worst godmother—”

“You’re fine. Stop.” Karl sighed, retrieving his hand before tucking it in between his legs. “Let me...just, let me worry about George, okay? I’ve got him.”

Felicity sniffled, letting out a subtle sigh. “Anthea would always say that.” Her lips turned into a smile. “And that he’s really lucky to have you.” A similar upturn showed at the corner of Karl’s lips. “I’d be so *goddamn* proud every time.” She took a pause, hesitant to speak again. “I know...I know you loved her, too. A lot.”

Karl sighed, shaking his head. “I can’t think about that.”

Felicity tilted her head to the side. “Karl—”

“I can’t do that right now, mom. Another day, okay?” Karl quietly pleaded.

“Okay.” She nodded, hiding her lips with her mug. “That’s fair. *Sorry.*” Karl shot her a small look, soothing her worries only a smidge. “And the others?”

Karl averted his gaze. “Alex hasn’t spoken about it. Niki hasn’t either. I think we’ve all been grieving separately. I think...” He slicked his lips, taking in a small breath. “...I think that’s the only way...right now.”

Felicity let out a huff of annoyance, swallowing the gulp she’d taken. “*Why* are you guys isolating yourselves?” She shook her head disapprovingly. “You have each other still. You *should* be talking for that exact reason.”

Karl nodded. “I know, I know. And we will when we’re ready.”

“Oh, Jesus.” It seemed as if another perturbed memory sparked her mind as she placed her mug onto the wooden island. “And Niki and Alex have always been so reliant on her. Alex especially.” She chewed on her bottom lip for a minute, her eyes darted across the island before she perked up in her seat. “You know what?”

Karl smiled, amused. “Tell me what.”

“I’m gonna do it.” She straightened her posture, the stool emitting a small creak. “Gonna talk to Big Q and my little platinum princess. Gonna sort them out.”

Karl chuckled, lightly throwing his hands up. “Okay—”

“Okay.”

“Alright—”

“Alright. I can...I can do this.”

Karl’s lips cracked into a soft smile. “Next to Anthea, they both trusted you *a lot*. Niki has been open with the three of us before, but Alex, not so much.” He sucked the air through his teeth, cocking his head to the side. “Good luck, boss.” He teasingly taunted. “I adore him to bits, but the walls around his emotions are *so fucking* thick—”

“You are *not* helping right now, little guy—”

“Little.” Karl snickered under his breath. “Says the woman who has to get on her tippiest of toes to reach the second shelf.”

Felicity shot him a jaunty glare as she stood up from her stool, cradling her mug still. “I’m going to bed. Had enough of you.”

Karl giggled, mindlessly fiddling with his ring around his forefinger while she made her exit.

“Karl?” Felicity called out from where she stopped in the doorway. “We’re gonna talk.” She ordered and he let out a small sigh. “You’re my rock. Can’t have you crumbling on me.”



Not really wanting to sleep with the thoughts racing through his mind, Karl made his way to the backcourt of the palace; coursing through the acres of forest before he reached his atelier, which was situated next to a river—the entire spot unknown to anyone that wasn’t a resident of the palace or his close friends.

Karl felt comfortable and at peace here; a cabin-like cluttered mess with little trinkets lying around on bookshelves, books occupying the floor, antique couch, and desk. A desk holding things taken

from the earth; rocks and minerals collected by George, peculiar shaped twigs and rare feathers found by Quackity and Niki.

He could spend days here and he had in the past. When Felicity had taught him Terrakinetic healing, Karl was hyper fixated on attempting new remedies through the plethora of books on alchemy that busied his station.

Karl took off his glasses after a half-minute or so of going through his alchemy books for no particular reason other than to get his mind off things.

He reclined in his leather chair, eyes coming to a close as he welcomed the sound of the rain slipping through the tall trees and scattering over the roof of his cabin.

Until a knock ripped him out of his solace.

Sitting up, riddled with confusion, Karl wondered who could be at his door, given the time of night.

After walking down the two steps to reach the front door and opening it, Karl was met with a familiar face, raindrops slipping down the ivory skin; clothes soaked from the downpour that grew heavy over time.

“George?” Karl squinted at him, the dark sky not doing his eyesight any favours. “Dude, it’s two in the morning. What the heck are you doing out here?”

George looked at him through his lashes, dripping droplets of the rain occupying them as he shivered; his arms wrapped tightly around his frame.

It was then that Karl noticed he wasn’t wearing anything but sweatpants and his bathrobe; combat boots untied and as soaked as he.

“C’mon. Get in here.” Karl ushered, gently grabbing him by the shoulders before pulling him inside. “You’re *shaking*, George.” He remarked worriedly, searching for the brunet’s eyes that were set on the floor; *he was drunk*, that much Karl could tell. “You okay?” The brunet shook his head, his body trembling. “Okay...okay.” Karl nodded, briefly looking across the room before looking back at him. “We’ll get you dried up, okay?”

Before Karl could leave off to the sole bedroom in the atelier, George fastened his fingers around his wrist, keeping him in place. The chestnut-haired boy stopped in his tracks and allowed himself to be lightly drawn back.

And the moment George looked up into his eyes, Karl immediately pulled him into his embrace; ignoring the wetness of the brunet’s clothes transferring onto his own.

And he didn’t pull back when George pulled him in closer, tightening his arms around his shoulders as he breathed out shakily onto Karl’s shoulder. “I fucked up, Karl.” His teeth chattered from the cold he had endured. “I keep fucking up.”

“Shh, shh.” Karl hushed, soothingly carding his fingers through the brunet’s damp hair. “You’re not thinking straight.”

“I’m disappointing her, aren’t I? I’m failing her.” George continued through a strained whisper, muffled against Karl’s shoulder. “I can’t fight. I don’t know what I’m doing but I can’t be sober. Don’t make me—I can’t—”

Karl tutted, tightening his hold around his frame before peppering soft kisses into his hair. “You’re fine. Shh, shh.”

Not knowing what to say, or if saying anything would even make a difference or make matters worse, Karl’s silence tarried. He continued to hold George as he released his built-up constraints through kept-back tears.



‘I can’t be sober.’

Spoken through the words of someone that was hurting so much, his only escape was to be constantly out of it.

And who was Karl to deny George—shaking cold, sobering up with murderous thoughts ready to attack—of the escape he needed through herbal tea?

George hadn’t said a word since the request, much less looked at Karl since having broken down in his arms.

Karl didn’t ask any more questions, nor did he ask for confirmation on which tea he wanted; it was an unspoken understanding that it was to be hallucinogenic.

While Karl was procuring that, George had taken the time to get changed. And he’d keep looking over his shoulder from the hearth where he stood, almost as if he was scared that George wasn’t going to be sat on the rug at the fireplace.

He was worried, but he would never openly say that; knowing how much George hated being babied. But it felt comforting; watching the brunet’s eyes waver over the fire, sporting warm clothes and no longer shaking. Karl was at peace knowing he was safe.

It wasn’t until George had finished his tea that Karl got a word out of him; single-worded replies turned into sentences, which then turned into weighted responses.

George’s thoughts were loud, but he dealt with them quietly. And Karl always got reminded of how much shit he was dealing with inside his head when George would finally open up.

They sat next to each other, the antique couch serving as a backrest; the sound of the crackling fire mixed in with the rain pelting down the roof of the cabin fueled their silence.

“I wanna run away.” George deadpanned.

The reason they always got high together or enjoyed spending one-on-one time was behind their agreement on the effects of bloodshed and hierarchies tainting this kingdom.

So, without taking a beat, Karl scoffed lightly. “I do not blame you.”

“It’s so shit, Karl.” George huffed, bringing his knees to his chest. “Everything is so shit about life in general.”

That, however, was something they didn’t quite feel entirely the same about.

“Like?” Karl quietly asked.

“Like why must we *do* things?” George shook his head slightly, the thought poisoning his mind. “Why are we forced to have dreams, aspirations, relationships...you know? I just want to leave it

all behind and..." He clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth before a sigh escaped him. "...hide somewhere—unknown to a single soul." He leaned back into the couch. "Because what's the point? What is the point of anything? I would lose everything and gain nothing, and that's exactly what the world offers in the first place: *absolutely nothing*."

Karl drew in his bottom lip as he looked away from him, eyes glazing over the fire as he pondered. This wasn't the first time he's had this conversation with George, but it was the first time he blatantly expressed it.

Before, Karl was only able to ascertain George's reluctance to live through the authors he idolized and philosophers he looked up to.

"I get the whole...dreams and aspiration thing." Karl started slowly, choosing his words carefully so as to not open a debate regarding life in the mindset George currently held. "But...the world doesn't *not* offer anything."

George glanced at him, expression unreadable, though it was clear he was awaiting an expansion on the statement.

"It offers relationships, dude." Karl smiled softly. "Between family, friends, lovers. Chasing aspirations and dreams is a lot of work, and I'm not saying that creating and maintaining relationships isn't either, but it's worth it. It's the *only* beautiful thing to come out of the world we live in." He continued, losing George's visual retention, though he knew the brunet was still listening as he placed his gaze upon the fireplace. "Hey," He called, silently asking for his eyes, and upon receiving them, he continued gently. "I get not wanting to live for things that don't really matter or have any meaning...but *this* matters right?" He nodded his head between the two of them, George followed his movement. "This has meaning? You and I? You and Alex? Niki? Your *father*?"

George paused on his words, allowing them to linger in his mind before he slowly nodded in concurrence.

"If I ran away...I *would* lose everything, but I would lose everything I *care* about." Karl offered a small shrug. "And that would make me just about the most miserable person on this planet." George looked away from him. "This kingdom fucking sucks, I'm not arguing that. But all we have is each other, George." He reached over, wrapping his fingers around George's forearm when he leaned into him. "Make 'us' your meaning."

George hung his head lightly. "I never wanted to make you guys feel as if I don't appreciate you. 'Cause I do." He glanced at him through his unruly fringe. "I do care about you guys." He leaned into his side, their shoulders supporting each other's weight. "And you, especially...I mean...you just listen to me complain about life all the fucking time. I don't know how or *why* you do it."

Karl scoffed lightly, bumping their shoulders. "You said it yourself." He ducked his chin, levelling their eyes through a grounded gaze. "I love you—do you have any idea how much I actually love you?" George's lips pursed into a tight-lipped smile before he shook his head, and though Karl knew that George *did* know; it was just like him to want to *hear* it. "I'd do everything I can to keep you around, you nimrod."

George simpered; and as if they felt a similar sensation course through their bodies, their foreheads knocked, the tip of their noses nudged.

And for the first time in a long time, Karl was able to get a taste of the person George was before all the horrible things in this kingdom stole his light.

And he wasn't sure when it had happened, but he felt George's lips on his. And though the last time he'd felt this was years ago, he fell into it as he once so easily did.

Not a single thought was processed, nor was it taken seriously from either party as they broke it off with a giggle.

"I think the drugs are working," George whispered, breath warm in-between brushing lips.

Karl leaned back, letting out a small laugh; eyes seemingly heavier than they were before. "Holy *shit*."

"Oh my *God*." George's hands flew to his face. "My face is so warm—"

"My ears are hot." Karl covered his ears, giggling softly. "Aw, *George*—"

"*What*." George groaned, his voice muffled against his hands.

Karl snorted through his laugh. "We just kissed."

"I *know*." George sounded embarrassed, but when Karl looked over, he saw the prominence in his cheekbones indicating a familiar smile. "We haven't..." He dropped his hands, turning his attention to Karl.

"In a while, for sure." Karl began blinking at the rug as he saw the bristles sway from side to side. "Is the rug waving at you too?"

"Mhm. It's saying 'Hi'." George drew in his bottom lip, pushing down a mellow smile.

"Hi." Karl waved at the carpet as a chorus of chuckles escaped them both.

They spent a good hour lounging around, exuding the ideas that their high minds pushed onto them. Karl played some discs on his record player and they danced with each other, staggering around; their giggles floating up in space along with their intoxicated minds.

And after a while, the sound of the crackling fire returned, mediating with that of the turning disc; the album had come to its end as they were sprawled out on the carpet in serene silence.

"Hey, handsome?" Karl quietly asked, eyes droopy on the ceiling.

"Hm?"

"Quackity loves you too much for him to be genuinely pissed." Karl swallowed, his throat dry. "Same thing with Cole."

Though he hadn't heard a reply from the brunet, Karl was content that he had at least passed it on.

A few more minutes of silence escaped them both before a thought edged a grin at Karl's lips. "Wonder how Prince of Vulcan would feel knowing that I'm just going around kissing his man."

"Fuck sakes, Karl." George huffed, earning a laugh from the chestnut-haired boy. "Not you too. I have Quackity and Niki for this shit."

"So, what's the move? Are you going for it?" Karl teased.

"Shut up," George whispered through an exasperated sigh.

“Okay, no, but seriously.” Karl propped himself up on his elbows so he could glance over at George who laid a few feet away from him. “You’re talking to him, or *have* spoken with him. And you don’t speak to anyone other than us, so...you’re somewhat interested, right?”

George’s eyes fluttered shut with a faint smile that grew on his lips. “*Interested.*” He repeated.

“Yeah—”

“It’s not him I’m interested in.”

“Okay...” Karl trailed off, eyes mindlessly scanning the room. “...then what?” He reposed his calculating stare on the brunet.

“Something’s not...right,” George began, gathering his thoughts for a moment; Karl allowed him before the brunet spoke again. “You know, about the relationship he has with his father.”

“Like, what do you mean?”

“Like...” George swallowed, taking in a deep breath. “...his father’s a dickhead to him, it seems like. And he just...lets it happen. It’s like he’s being controlled. Doing everything against his own will.”

Karl’s brows furrowed as he noticed George’s relaxed features; if he didn’t know any better, he would have thought George cared.

And from the earlier glimpse into the person George used to be, Karl wondered if a part of him *did* in fact care and the brunet hadn’t realized it yet because he had adopted this new persona; one that wasn’t fazed by anything or anyone.

Because as far as Karl could remember, there was a time where George actively tried to do the right thing; a piece of that moral following him into his adulthood.

Perhaps one of the many reasons he felt so empty; all the wrongdoings of tyrants taking a toll on things he wanted to make right, but didn’t have the power to.

Because as far as he was aware, George wore his heart on his sleeve.

“I think...” George interlocked his fingers on his stomach. “...he’s hiding who really is behind who his father wants him to be.”

Karl bit his bottom lip, eyes hesitant on his best friend before he could no longer fight his deduction. “Sounds a lot like you’re interested in him, man.”

George scoffed a terse laugh, shaking his head lightly. “Call it whatever you want, Karl. It’s a decent distraction.” He let out a deep-seated sigh. “Fuck knows I’m gonna need a lot of those for when this place goes to shit in a month, or so.”

Karl didn’t want to worry, but a piece of him did where he wondered if he had gotten it wrong. Because maybe George was protecting himself when shielding his big heart with the fleeting effects of drugs and alcohol.

And he wondered what it would be like if he began openly caring again. Because admittedly, this was the worse possible time to do so; on the brink of battle and the tyrant’s son who had piqued his interest, Karl wondered how it would affect George.

And he wondered what would come out of it if George continued to care, how the lengths he'd go to could be limitless.

Because George wasn't scared to die.

And that part had Karl terrified.

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading and having patience with the pacing.

ik dnf seems like they won't be touching until the next century at the pace we're going, but it's comin. it is at the tip of my fingers. but for now, i offer some knf content. i cannot say i'm sorry (:

until the next ooooneeeee. catch you laterrr my fellow brainrotterrrs x

Fireborn

Chapter Summary

Sebastian creates a battle plan for Salacia, one that has Dream blaming himself for how George will deal, all while George continues through the downfall of his addictions.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Les Fleurs du Mal.

The book had come to him at a very strange time in his life, gifted by Felicity and his mother when they had gone to the over-world; since books had to be imported from there.

George hadn't asked for it, nor hinted at it; in all honesty, he was completely taken aback when the cover stared back at him through the ripped gift-wrap etched in multicoloured 'Happy Birthday's.

"Admittedly, honey..." Anthea had said, slightly grimacing. "*I had no clue what any of it meant,*" She pointed to the language, furrowing her brows at the french accents. "*I just knew you were teaching yourself french. And the French love him, so.*" She jutted her chin to the author's name.

Baudelaire—someone who Quackity and Niki argued shouldn't have been a role model to George at the age he'd began delving deeply into the author's work since having lost himself in the gifted book.

But the Demon from Baudelaire's *Destruction* had been the first entity George felt connected to through ink on paper; the exact entity that fulfilled *those cravings*. And before his cravings took the form of herbs and liquor, George would see *his* demon through naked bodies dressing his bedsheets; rosy skin his own brushed against, lips attaining to parts of his body that craved carnal desires.

Until that stopped being enough. Because here was the thing about addicts; they could *always* find something better, more powerful, to take over their deepest want to feel *alive*—because the feeling of being dead was too painful to face when being forced to physically exist in a world they despised.

And with an entire realm now under his ruling, following the death of his own mother, George was further forced to physically exist against his will. And with his father now asking him to put an end to the drinking, George was having to let go of his toxic attachment to the demon that ruled the kingdom in his heart.

Why the fuck couldn't Mother birth more than one child; one that wasn't a drug-reliant nihilist? George wondered angrily as he rolled onto his back from where he woke on Karl's couch, arm slipping from where it secured the chestnut-haired boy whose back was previously pressed against the brunet's chest. *How the hell are you meant to go about this kingship stone-cold sober?*

“For someone who thinks so quietly,” Karl sleepily mumbled as he turned in his spot, eyes still closed as he laid his head onto the brunet’s shoulder. “Your thoughts are deafeningly loud, handsome.”

George’s chuckle was inaudible, subdued by his poisonous thoughts that began attacking him before he had time to adjust to his reality.

The rain from last night followed them into the morning; George could hear the faint trickling sound of the raindrops peppering the roof and windows, though much lighter than they had been yesterday.

Karl placed a lazy hand onto his stomach, George finally laid his head atop Karl’s until he noticed a faint black streak tainting tan skin.

Reaching for Karl’s hand before lifting up slightly, George scrutinized the familiar resemblance of smudged pencil lead. “You were drawing.”

Karl nodded, the sleep still swimming in his brain held back a worded reply. George’s mind, at that moment, procured a memory that seemed to have taxed them both; Karl a little earlier than George, judging by the lead streak on his palm.

The faint memory emulated Anthea assisting Karl in getting over the precise obstacle following his childish complaints about how the other kids in his class didn’t smudge, him being embarrassed to have been the only one.

“Thought you’d gotten over the smudging.” George’s words rested in between his breath as if that’s where they were to remain.

And he was right to speak quietly when he noticed the sudden shift in Karl’s limbs; like the statement roused him.

“I was distracted,” Karl mumbled, allowing his hand to slip from George’s.

As if his assumption and memory aligned, George subtly glanced down at him, only to be met with the tip of his nose; his hair shielding the rest of his features. *You were thinking about her and you got distracted.*

“Karl...” George began through a whisper, quieter than his voice had previously been, almost like he was treading on thin ice with what he was to ask next. “You haven’t really...” He continued slowly, conscious of Karl’s slight movement against him. “...spoken about her.”

“Have you?”

Defensive, the way he always got when being non-intentionally struck with something he hadn’t mentally digested.

And instead of rebutting by stating that he had indeed spoken about his mother last night, George shook his head, which earned him an apologetic sigh from the younger.

“You hurting?” George kept his eyes over the features he could see, in search of any creases or twitch that could speak for things Karl would not admit.

Not verbally, at least, because he gradually nodded; hair brushing against the fabric of George’s sweater. “But it’ll pass, George.” In a hopeful tone, one that sounded so defeated it almost hurt George to hear, Karl continued. “It’ll pass eventually.” He looked up into his eyes, George was

almost taken aback by his smile contradicting the hurt behind his blue irises.

George wished he was good at verbally comforting others because this was painful; watching him hurt. Especially because Karl was his anchor, and George stupidly couldn't offer him the same even if he so desperately wanted to.

A knock brought them out of their trance, Karl was the first to direct his eyes to the door; already in search of an escape from a conversation that neither of them was ready to have.

"Probably Quackity." George huffed, annoyed as he grudgingly sat up on the couch.

Karl was already at the door, hugging a blanket around him as he looked over his shoulder at him. "I wouldn't be so sure about that." He snickered, adding confusion to George's reluctance in meeting the intruder of their momentary solace.

Until the door opened, revealing a woman who shaved a solid portion of the pain weighing down in George's mind.

"Morning, baby—" *Felicity*. Her eyes had flickered from her son to George the moment she noticed the brunet arise from the couch out of surprise.

Because where the fuck had she been?

And a piece of George wanted to be angry, wanted to go off on her for not being here when he could've used her support. Until he realized how he had evaded everyone, just as she probably had been; one of the many reasons they got along on a personal level.

And in someone that was meant to serve as a second maternal figure to him—being his godmother—she stood at the same level that his three best friends did.

"Oh my God." Felicity's hand flew to her mouth, cheeks growing red as her features contorted.

Karl ducked his chin as an endeared smile formed on his face, stepping aside to let his mother in; almost as if he knew she would go running into his best friend's arms.

And she had. And George welcomed her into the biggest, most loving embrace he could muster; pulling her in tighter when she clung onto him. Every apology, every shared grief, sounding through her head was transposed onto him the longer they held each other.

"C'mon, Fel." George chuckled nervously, fighting back tears the best he could while speaking into her shoulder; her perfume filling his nostrils in the most refreshing sense. "Don't go soft on me now."

And though she didn't need to convince him, her presence and embrace assuring enough, Felicity breathed out heavily; tightening her arms around his shoulders. "I'm here for good." Her voice was muffled against his sweater until she pulled away slightly, only so her hands could cradle his face; George's smile beamed when his eyes met teary ones. "I promise you, lovie."

Lovie. George's smile widened at the adopted nickname, pulling her back into the embrace so as to not break down in the arms of the second Terran royal in the past twelve hours. "I know you are."



Less than twenty-four hours had passed since Dream was blamed for Anthea being used as bait to go against The Nether. And he felt as if he hadn't stopped mentally kicking himself ever since his

father kept his eyes locked on him like he knew he was cementing every single word into his son's head so as to haunt him endlessly.

'You always mess everything up.'

And it continued to haunt him for hours, minutes, seconds before the meeting; the previous statement taking the form of another blame conversed through the malice in his father's voice: *'If you're ever so worried about King George's feelings, just know it was all you.'*

And that kept circling Dream's head when he met eyes with the brunet who stepped inside his palace, followed by his soldiers and guard.

Dream had bolted the narrative into his head: *he's to be responsible for anything that happens to King George on that battlefield.*

They had briefly caught eyes in the midst of Sebastian welcoming the Salacians in, and it was then that he was reminded of the last time they spoke; his eyes still habituating sadness, just no longer riddled with the drowsiness alcohol—and whatever else he was doing—offered.

Upon filing into the dining room, around forty men and women occupying the table, leaving but a few chairs empty for the rest that lingered about in the room, Dream's eyes immediately fell onto the king.

In all honesty, Dream hadn't stopped stealing glances at George the moment he got here.

And the build-up in wanting to speak with him urged his steps towards him when George was at the catering table, hands to himself, but eyes dancing on the amuse-bouche on display.

"Your Majesty." Dream softly called upon reaching his side.

"Hey." George hadn't even looked up, Dream wasn't sure if it was a good thing the brunet was able to match his voice to his face.

'Hey.'

The initial 'Hey' at Punz's birthday had surprised him, but now Dream almost felt endeared by it.

"Hi." Dream returned, eyes scanning the visible portion of the king's face; similar to the night in the pub where he wished he could see him in his entirety. "How was...how was last night?"

"Hm?" George mindlessly dragged his finger across the surface of the table; eyes wavering over the food as if he wanted to grab some, yet never quite reaching out for it.

"You don't seem to be sporting a hangover, so." Dream's chuckle was riddled with nerves, ones he always seemed to possess around George.

George—who seemed and sounded completely spaced out, eyes reeling over something as if he was in deep contemplation. Dream followed his calculating stare and was met with the short row of wine bottles.

And for a moment, Dream was going to offer him a drink until two noticeable things caught his attention, which derived a calculation of his own.

The first thing was that he'd witness George knock back copious amounts of alcohol as if his life depended on it, as though it was second nature to him.

“I’m a regular.” George had said that night in the pub, eyes droopy with liquor and drugs. *“After a while, this starts to taste and feel like tap water.”*

And he was unapologetic about it, so *why* wasn’t he just going for it? It was on display for a reason. It was there for him to take. And yet he stood, brows knitted, chewing his bottom lip in hesitation.

Though Dream had an inkling of what or who he was looking at, due to having been already acquainted with a similar image from his past, he settled to receive his answer with another approach. “You know, um.” He cleared his throat, noticing the small tic in the brunet’s stance as if his voice had knocked him out of a trance. “You should probably get on that before the soldiers do.” He nodded his head to the wine bottles, even though George hadn’t looked at him to see his reference; they both secretly knew the topic at hand. “They drain them and lick every last drop.”

But nothing—George’s eyes merely fell to the table, straying away from the wine bottles. And in that instant, Dream had a feeling he knew the situation at hand.

“I’m a regular.”

A regular wouldn’t be taking this long to jump at the offer, so what are you waiting for?

But the second thing that had caught Dream’s attention was George’s hands, shaky with tremors at his side. And that was all it took for it to make sense.

Because Dream had seen this before; the hesitance towards something a drunk so desperately needed and the tremors laced with burning addiction.

“Are you alright?” Dream asked, finally earning a pair of distant, umber eyes. “Your hands.” He flickered his eyes down to the dainty fingers at the brunet’s side.

George quickly pocketed them, veering his eyes from Dream as he did a once-over of the dining table. “How long do these meetings last?”

“What,” Dream spoke under his breath, almost as if he was still adjusting to his deduction and surprised at how quickly he’d avoided answering his question, and how much quicker he’d been at brushing everything under the rug. “Oh, uh...not...long?” Tone sounding unsure, which earned him a quizzical look from the brunet, he continued. “It really depends on if he’s going to go into the battle plan today.”

George’s brows knitted. “Is he?”

Dream mirrored the kink in his brows before offering a small shrug. “I—I don’t know.”

George chuckled lightly. “Isn’t that...something you’re meant to know? As his next in line.”

He *laughed*. Not nearly as audible as Dream had hoped and maybe not even a genuine sound, but it was delicate, moreover bittersweet. *Are you trying to seem okay?* Dream searched for his eyes, George only stared back half-expectantly. *And are you aware that you’re not fooling me?*

“Or,” George tilted his chin, a barely noticeable upturn in the corner of lips; furthering his crafted escape from the questions earlier asked. “Is that something else he excludes you from?”

He wants to move on. Dream blinked at him, breaking a calculating gaze as he dropped his subconscious notes. *And though he could’ve just walked away, on the edge of being exposed, he’s making conversation. To save himself, but ...* Dream crossed his hands behind his back, *he’s not*

walked away yet.

'Is that something else he excludes you from?'

Almost puzzled by the question that sounded more as a playfully taunting statement, Dream thought back to when the brunet had somewhat stood up for him at Punz's birthday; calling Sebastian out for disbarring his son from the private meeting.

"Well," Dream pushed down a knowing smile that seemed apparent on the brunet's lips. "Seeing as Eurus and Terra aren't present, he most likely *won't* go over the battle plan."

George studied the blonde's features. "Were they not invited?" And before Dream could answer, the brunet straightened his posture slightly. "Or is that another piece of information he's keeping from you?"

Dream wasn't sure *what the fuck* was going on, but he felt as if he was being interrogated in the most subtle sense. Because George didn't seem to be awaiting an answer, yet everything he was saying sounded off as a question.

Never pressing, however. Just clever, but not enough to have conned Dream. *Because you're just doing this to push me away from re-addressing your hands, which probably continued to tremble in the security of your pockets.*

Dream spoke through a light smirk. "No, Your Majesty," He began, a lop-sided smile turning into a genuine one when the brunet hid his own by briefly looking at the ground. "*That* one, I was made aware of."

"Do tell," George said under his breath before looking back up at him, his smile vanishing into reposed lips.

A chuckle through a terse breath emitted Dream as he looked over the room before returning his eyes to the brunet. "Queen of Terra is still..." He pressed his lips into a thin line before sighing. "...still in mourning. Rightfully so. We do not know where she is, nor could we get a hold of her."

"Felicity." George mindlessly stated, looking to the side in a brief thought.

Dream was almost taken aback by the display of a first-name basis until he remembered how close Queen Anthea and Queen Felicity were.

"Want to know something?" George asked, ripping him out of his thoughts in an instant.

Dream's eyebrows lightly shot up. "...Yes?"

Following what was to unexpectedly happen, Dream almost wished he hadn't agreed to know. Because George leaned up to him, hovering his lips over his ear as he transferred his secret through a whisper; warm breath, which left those pretty lips and transposed onto Dream's already flushed skin, set off millions of alarms in his head, awakening the hairs on his arm as he stood frozen in his spot.

"I saw her this morning," George whispered before pulling away entirely, eyes glazing over the blonde's own.

He wished he hadn't agreed to know because his flushed complexion spoke for how flustered he was. And not a single direct contact was made between them, which promoted his humiliation.

Unfazed, unlike Dream who was still recovering, George turned unamused eyes to the side. “Don’t go telling your father that.” He sighed indifferently after picking up a grape from a tray before looking up at him. “He seems to be good at keeping things from you, maybe you could do the same.”

Dream stood still in his spot, eyes still fixed on him as the brunet walked past him to occupy a seat at the dining table.

In the short time that he’s known this standoff-ish human, the last thing he’d expect was for him to get so unapologetically close for something as puerile as whispering a secret.

That’s what people do when telling secrets, moron. Dream wanted to tell himself as he turned around slowly to glance at the dining table.

But.

Couldn’t he have just lowered his voice since the chatter of the forty-sum soldiers was boisterous enough to drown out his tone?

And as Dream found that the only vacant seat was the one next to George, his heart rate picking up in pace, he found an answer to his jostled feelings: *you’re crushing on him and reading too much into it.*

Move on. He tried avoiding eye contact with the brunet when taking a seat beside him, though failed miserably when they briefly met eyes as he lowered himself in his seat; quickly looking away as his heart sank further.

Dream reinforced his feeble helping mental note. *Move. On.*



If Dream could spend hours just simply sitting next to George, he would. No matter how desperate that sounded, he would. But at that moment, with Sebastian explaining a very important plan as to how they were to assess battle, and which weapons would work best against the opponent, Dream could *not* focus.

Hyperfixated on the way his and George’s arms would be touching were it not for the thickness of their clothes, or how if he rested his hand on the edge of the armrest, their pinkies would most likely brush.

And in fighting the urge to feel his skin against his own, Dream twirled his pocket-knife with the hand that could feel the mere touch of George’s. And he twirled the blade throughout the entire meeting, eyes boring into his father’s while his mind was entirely focused on George; his relented huffs and sighs as he grew antsy, the way he wouldn’t be able to sit still in his seat—continuously moving around, sliding down and back up in his chair occasionally.

He was just as restless, but from the vision of how his hands shook and how he surprisingly denied the offer of alcohol, Dream knew they were restless for different reasons.

When George and his soldiers returned to their realm, Dream felt half-empty; amiss the presence of the pretty brunet, but thankful for the fact that he now felt as if he could finally breathe.

And it wasn’t just because of his obvious infatuation towards him, but also because of his worry about George being out on the battlefield with no prior fighting experience. And because if he died out there, Dream would never forgive himself.

Because *whatever happens to King George on that battlefield, is on you*. A twisted wordplay on the mindset his father had implemented on him, he who barely gave Dream time to step out of the dining room before calling upon him once all the Vulcan soldiers filed out.

“I need to revise the battle plan with you.” Sebastian placed his palms onto the slab of wood, overlooking his sprawled-out notes. “Shut the door. It’s confidential information until I release it to Luke and the others.”

Dream tucked his pocket knife into the side pocket of his techwear pants, shutting the door as ordered before he joined his side, his father stepping aside slightly, allowing him space.

“This is gonna be our placements.” Sebastian pointed to the frontline, Dream’s name, as well as two other trusted soldiers’, were scribbled next to the other.

“You’re not leading?” Dream’s brows furrowed when he noticed his father’s placement two rows down from the middle.

Sebastian glanced at him before lifting his hands from the papers, turning in his spot to face his son. “That’s what it says, yes.”

Dream mirrored his actions, their eyes suddenly levelled. “And...you’re trusting *me* to lead everyone into the battle?”

“Do you think it’s a bad idea?” Sebastian asked, reconsulting his map.

And it was in these moments that Dream didn’t entirely hate his guts; it was in these moments that almost every bad thing he’d done or said, were momentarily effaced by the look of genuine care—care for Dream’s opinion.

Because he had said it once before and Dream kept it locked in a mental spot which he returned to whenever he asked himself why he continued to help his father.

“No, not all.” Dream softly replied, eyes reposed on the plan. “I just didn’t think you’d find me suitable for *that* position against The Nether.” He felt his father’s stare on him, causing him to look over.

“Why not?” Sebastian’s eyes narrowed. “You’re my best warrior.”

Dream smiled weakly, returning his eyes to the map. “Switch Punz with Nicol.” He dragged the pad of his forefinger from the third row before tapping the second. “And I’d say it’s a pretty flawless plan.”

Sebastian’s silence had Dream momentarily on edge until the man let out a deep sigh. “This is why I need your opinion.” He shook his head, following through with his son’s instruction before clicking his pen.

Feeling oddly suffocated by the energy coursing through him following the mild compliment, Dream gave his father a curt nod—mentally dismissing himself before making his way towards the door.

Dream was almost thankful that this was one of the rare times their conversations hadn’t ended on a tense note until his father spoke again. “I think we’ll stand a perfect chance against The Nether with Salacia defending first.”

Dream stopped dead in his tracks. For a brief moment, the ticking needles on the grandfather clock

were the only thing heard.

Dream slowly turned on his spot, features scrunched. “What?”

“Salacia will be going up first.” Sebastian coolly stated, cleaning up his loose notes. “The Nether won’t have an advantage over their elemental powers. Sending them first, then Euris....they’ll be completely tired out before us and Terra emerge.”

“But...” Dream had entered a space of denial, not yet accepting the fact that his father was indeed sending Salacia out on their own. “...they don’t have the best soldiers in the Kingdom, sir. Us and Terra do.”

“We are at a disadvantage with our elemental powers. Salacia is not. Hence why they’re going first, then Euris. And also why King George will be leading—”

“*What?*” Dream was now fully alarmed, awakened from his denial which had him previously dazed.

“What?” Sebastian finally looked up from his papers and at his son. “Only the royals of each realm possess the most optimal elemental powers. Moreover the highest in the hierarchy,” Almost as if he didn’t understand the visible, growing rage on his son’s expression, Sebastian involuntarily continued. “...which is King George—”

“King George should not be going anywhere *near* the frontline.” Dream’s tone had unintentionally projected, earning his father’s attention as he crossed the table to make his way towards his son. “Let alone lead—”

“And why is that?”

“*Why?* Sir, he’s never fought a *day* in his life—”

“He’ll learn—”

“He’ll *die*.” Dream concluded through a strained tone.

Sebastian stopped in his tracks, allowing a brief silence where Dream composed himself. “We train before battle for a reason. The first training is tomorrow, he’ll be—”

“You’re not hearing me.” Dream shook his head, what was previously rage had transpired into a panic. “He’s never been trained. He’s probably never even held a weapon. Every warrior in this kingdom has been training since their childhood. No amount of training from this point leading up to battle will be enough to prepare him.”

Sebastian’s confusion quickly fell into indifference. “I don’t care, Clay.” He sighed tiredly, returning to the head of the table. “He is in possession of Anthea’s powers—”

“He probably doesn’t even know how to use them—”

“Then he’ll try his best, won’t he?” Sebastian whirled around, tone laced with irritable fury.

“You trust my opinion, right? You said that.” Dream took a few steps forward, as fervent as his tone. “So, change it.” He looked at his father, who gave no sign of retaliation, encouraging the blonde’s urgency. “Sir, you have to change it—”

“I’m not changing anything—”

“Do you not *care* if he dies?”

“No.” Sebastian deadpanned, Dream’s breath hitched. “I care that we win the battle. And this is the best plan for Salacia.”

“Not if their king *dies*—”

“And why do you care? Because he’s your friend?” Sebastian dramatically pouted before chuckling bitterly. “There you go again...being pathetic.” He shook his head. “The plan is to remain. I will not alter it on the account of my *own son* being emotionally weakened by something as meaningless as *friendship*.” The grimace on his face rejected the emphasized word as if it hurt him to speak it into existence.

Sebastian walked up to him, Dream measured his breathing, maintained his composure the best he could.

George going into battle was inevitable, but him being on the frontline was a suicide mission. Dream’s poisoning mindset returned to attack him the longer his father held his eyes while approaching him.

“Don’t be a fool.” Sebastian stopped in front of him, chin held high. “Regardless of who dies, we are winning this battle.”

Before, it was a question of ‘if’ and now, it was a ‘when’; *when* George dies in battle, the blame will fall onto Dream.

“Did you hear me?” Sebastian pressed.

And Dream, crushed and powerless, unwillingly nodded.



Some time in the evening is when George had reached his limit.

Though his withdrawals were kicking him in the ass throughout the entire day, especially during that godforsaken meeting with Sebastian talking on for ages, George had surprisingly managed to tame his cravings.

And though his primary motive behind progressing the conversation with the prince was to steer him away from his curiosity behind why he’d refuse to drink, George’s secondary motive *was* to purposely fuck with him.

And he always thought his friends were being idiots with their teasing about the prince crushing on him, but the impulse that had him whispering into his ear, and the look on the blonde’s face following the action, had George realizing that they were right.

George wondered what he could do with that confirmation; the flustered look on the prince’s face upon *mere* contact between them both. And he knew he was playing a dangerous game, but *fuck*, George *needed* distractions if he couldn’t drown his system in drugs and alcohol.

And *fuck*, George knew he wasn’t playing fair, but it’s not like he’d totally shut down the idea of sleeping with the prince, were he to ask.

Yet for someone who was such a flustered mess around him, the prince didn’t seem to *be* making any advances. Instead, he would ask questions. *Fuck’s sake, would he ask questions.*

And when he asked about the tremor in his hands, George thought; *God, you are so broken. Physically unable to push down how fucking reliant you are on alcohol.* And he hated that he cared about his presented image to the blonde, and he knew that these mental reprimands wouldn't have surfaced if he *were* drunk or high.

And he kept telling himself, *don't cave.* And then his mother was mentioned by Sebastian in the meeting, and then George thought about how she'd fit right in, including herself in the discussion and helpful in creating a fighting plan. And George thought, *don't fucking cave.* But all he could think about was her. And how he didn't *want* to think of her. And how the only way to do *that* was through intoxication.

And so late in the evening, *he was at his fucking limit.*

"Karl—"

"No, George." Karl shook his head as he progressed into his room.

George shut the door behind him, not wanting anyone else, especially not Quackity—who he was still avoiding like the plague—to hear his desperate attempts in getting Karl to give him a blunt.

"Please, just—" George wrapped his fingers around his friend's wrist, seizing his steps; Karl's back was still to him. "...just so I can sleep tonight."

"Dude..." Karl released a crushed sigh, turning around to face him. "...if I say 'yes', it'll never end."

"It *will*." George desperately said. "It will, I promise. With training and everything—I'll be busy, yeah? I'll be doing...things—and—and—I won't *think* about it."

And if he could only hear himself, starving and frantic, George would have shrunk within himself. But he couldn't hear himself, only *his* demon—crying and on his knees, begging George to do *something*.

"Please, Karl." George's voice cracked down to a whisper as his fingers loosened around Karl's wrist. "Just one last time."

Karl's features softened as his eyes narrowed on George's face, almost like he could see the devilish entity inside his mind, screaming for help.

Karl's eyes fluttered shut as he let out a deep sigh. "Okay."

George's eyes widened, releasing a punched-out breath; he wrapped his fingers around Karl's shoulders, placing a fervent and desperate kiss onto his cheek before pulling him into a bone-crushing embrace.

Karl didn't hug back. George could almost taste the self-hatred he would feel the following morning.

And it only progressed after they shared a blunt; when George had his head in Karl's lap as the two of them laid on the floor of his bedroom.

"Is this..." George's eyelids kept slipping open and close, Karl's fingers threading through his hair lulling him to sleep. "...what rock bottom feels like?"

Karl scoffed, George didn't have to look at him to know he was shaking his head. "You wouldn't

be asking me.” His fingers came to a slow stop in their regular course. “You’ll know when you hit it.”

And that had made things worse because if the way George felt *wasn’t* the worse it could get, *he was fucked*.



George woke up staring at the canopy atop his four bedposts, hatred coursing through his veins for a day he hadn’t yet lived through, though one he was sure he was going to hate with every fibre in his body.

He and Karl lingered in bed for a solid half-hour, not wanting to face the real world that awaited their presence behind George’s closed bedroom door. But it was only a matter of time until they grudgingly went down the steps and walked into the kitchen.

“Surprise!” Niki threw her arms up, doing ‘jazz’ hands.

George rubbed the sleep from his eye, lazily looking over the spread on the kitchen island before quietly muttering under his breath. “What...the fuck—”

“We thought you deserved to have breakfast here.” Ana turned from the stove, carrying a casserole of scrambled eggs before she placed them next to the toasted bread. “Like old times.”

Karl gave him a small tap on the back before joining Quackity’s side, the raven-haired boy was sitting at the stool, already digging into his breakfast. George chose to avoid the fact that he hadn’t once looked at him since he and Karl entered the kitchen.

George brought his eyes to his father. “Is that good with you?”

Cole leaned his weight into the kitchen island, offering a faint smile. “It was my idea.”

George returned the slight smile, knowing his father was still annoyed about the shattered statuette, but forgiving, nonetheless. He mouthed an inaudible ‘thank you’, which progressed the smile Cole was already sporting as he nodded understandingly.

“C’mon.” Niki laced George’s fingers with hers. “Food’s gonna get cold.”

“And you’re gonna need your fuel, won’t ya?” Ana winked at them as they sat at the kitchen island.

Unfortunately for the both of them, and in a way that felt as if Niki had planned it to be this way, George was sat next to Quackity.

“He will.” Cole leaned over the counter, fork grazing over the eggs on his plate. “Are you ready for your first ever training session?”

Karl snorted, almost spitting his water out before placing the glass back down on the counter. “That’s a joke, right?” He glanced between Cole and George.

George rolled his eyes at him, lips curved up into a smile.

“Fuck.” Quackity pouted, eyes searching the table. “Is there no more sausage?”

Karl sucked the air through his gritted teeth. “I *would* give you mine, but nah.”

Niki snickered, earning George's attention as he furrowed his brows at her. "Sounds kinda wrong with your eyes closed and no context." She whispered to him, causing George to mildly gawk at her through a surprised smile. "Don't mind me." She waved him off with her spoon. "Eat."

George returned his attention to his plate, sausage links stared back at him tauntingly; he took in a quiet breath before forking them onto Quackity's plate. Still refusing to make eye contact, George sharply forked his scrambled eggs, ignoring the fact that he could feel Quackity's eyes on him.

"Thanks," Quackity muttered, looking away from him.

"Didn't want them anyway." George feigned nonchalance in his tone before angrily shoving the forked eggs past his lips.

Upon looking up, he caught Karl's knowing smile as his blue eyes danced between his two childish friends; George could almost hear him call them 'idiots'.



"It's *our* fight. Why is training being held in Vulcan?" Quackity complained as he guided the four of them through the village.

"Fuck knows." Karl shrugged, pulling George into his side as he tightened the arm he had around his shoulder.

"Well, to be honest." Niki looked over her shoulder at Karl and George before returning her eyes to Quackity whose arm she had locked with hers. "Prince of Vulcan *is* the best warrior in the kingdom. He's the most looked up to, as far as I'm aware."

"*Damn.*" Karl puffed, glancing down at George. "That's *your* man we're talking about here."

George harshly elbowed Karl's side, causing the chestnut-haired boy to retrieve his arm from his shoulder in pain, yet it had still derived a laugh from him and Niki; Quackity, though deaf to anything in relation to George, could still be heard suppressing his laugh.

And though he would never encourage their teasing, Niki *was* right about something.

Because as they were welcomed to the Vulcan training field, *the prince and his guard*, seemingly in control of conducting training, *were both admittedly good at what they did.*

Like— George was entirely entranced in the way the prince projected his voice, speaking the instructions and course of events to follow before the demonstrations—*extremely fucking good at what he—they did.*

They did.

All of them.

That was what George tried to tell himself prior to the demonstration until he saw *him* in action. And as much as George fucking hated being here, participating in something he could never see himself doing, he could see the ardour of it.

The way the blonde made this look like a form of art. Four people against him as he maneuvered around the jabbed and juttied blades flawlessly, twirling and handling his own weapon with such blind confidence that sometimes—as much as George hated to admit it—would knock a curt breath out of him.

Because this was the same idiot that approached him with flushed cheeks and so much uncertainty. And here he was, in his element; sporting a cocky smile that surprisingly *didn't* rub George the wrong way whenever the blonde would succeed in dodging the attacks directed at him.

He hated making the association of fighting with art, but in the way he could see the calculated movements and attacks work itself in the curve of the blonde's eyebrows, executed at an impressively fast rate through the gracious swings of his blade, George thought it fascinating.

"Holy shit..." Niki breathed out from beside him when two swords were launched on either side of the prince who, once again, seemed completely composed under the attack. "...not gonna lie, Prince Vulcan is doing *and* looking extremely good right now."

"He's...alright." Quackity scoffed from beside her.

"You guys are overlooking the little dude over there." Karl jutted his chin to the prince's guard, sweat peppering his temple as he worked against the prince.

Quackity cackled. "Who, *Stinknap*? You're fucking joking—"

"No, seriously. He's not as good as George's man, but—"

George rolled his eyes. "Fuck *off*, Karl—"

"—he's kind of killing it." Completely dismissing his protest, Karl concluded.

George could feel a few pairs of eyes on them and when he looked in their direction, he noticed a few somewhat concerned and annoyed Terrans and Eurans. He almost wanted to flip them off but decided against it because they *were* being a little obnoxious.

"So," Prince of Vulcan breathed out heavily, slotting his sword at the back of his harness as he overlooked the crowd of soldiers. "You sort of get the gist, right?"

Someone, who George couldn't quite care to identify, yelled out. "You expect us to do *all* that?"

George, embarrassingly enough, had his eyes *glued* to the prince, so he couldn't be taken aback when he received his stare, but he was; straightening up in posture slightly with the small breath he took.

The prince's eyes stuttered on him before he quickly tore them from George after a moment that felt like it had lasted minutes. "Uh, no." He looked over at the person who had spoken. "I just want you all to do your best, alright?" He called out, sporting a light smile while glazing over the crowd of soldiers. "It's just the first practice. Don't go too hard on yourselves. You'll ace it all over time."

George wanted to blame this sudden interest towards the prince in the lack of drugs or alcohol pumping his system, which he knew dialled down his libido. But the more he allowed himself to get distracted by him throughout this training session, the more George thought his new distraction wouldn't be so hard to follow through with after all.



"Yo." Sapnap jogged after Dream, following his check-in with a practicing group from the Terra realm.

Both he and Sapnap had been going around the acres of the training field, guiding and helping paired teams or groups with their fighting techniques.

“What’s up?” Dream looked over his shoulder before the younger reached his side.

“Daddy Sebastian isn’t conducting these training sessions then, huh?” Sapnap smirked, earning a laugh from Dream as he bumped shoulders with him.

“No, he’s left me in charge for a while.” Dream spoke before emitting a light gag. “And *never* call him that again. Please.”

Sapnap chuckled lowly, nodding his head. “Just testing out names as I go along.”

“Well, that one is not it.” Dream gave him a light look.

“Noted.” Sapnap laughed as he looked over the training field. “Looks like we did a pretty good job for the first day, huh?”

“I’d say so.” Dream mindlessly responded, eyes cast to the grass they walked on.

“You alright?” Sapnap’s voice lured him out.

Dream quirked an eyebrow at him. “Yeah?”

Sapnap tilted his head to the side, mentally transpiring across a ‘*no, you’re fucking not*’. “I can tell when you’re in your head, bro.”

Dream smiled softly, brushing it off. “A little nervous about going up against The Nether.”

Sapnap puffed out a breath. “Fuck. Tell me about it.” He glanced over the training field before shrugging lightly. “But we have a solid chance, I’d say. For the first day, they’re all kicking ass.”

They are. Dream nodded in concurrence. *But not George.* And that’s what was truly going through his head, but he couldn’t explain that to Sapnap. At least not yet. Not until he figured out a way to get the king out of the mess he created *for* him.

“Can I ask you something?” Sapnap cleared his throat, taking a break in their walk, urging Dream to slow down in his own steps. “Are we not doing this to avenge Queen Anthea?”

Dream’s eyebrows knitted as he looked down at Sapnap. “...Yeah?”

Sapnap squinted at him, the sun blaring in his eyesight. “Cool. So, where’s her son?”

Dream’s brows shot up as he immediately began scanning the training field. “What...” He spoke under his breath, turning in his spot to cover areas he hadn’t yet. “I saw him earlier.”

“So did I, but...” Sapnap earned his eyes. “...think he might’ve just left after instructions. His little posse is still here, though.” He jutted his chin to the three familiar faces Dream had seen at Punz’s birthday. “He might still be around.”

Dream let out a deep huff, still scrutinizing the area the best he could.

“I’ve already looked on this side of the field,” Sapnap pointed to his right. “And I’d help you look for him, but I gotta help these motherfuckers out.”

Dream waved him off, already heading in the opposite direction. “It’s fine. You got this?”

Sapnap gave him a thumb-up. “Go find your lover, pal.”

Dream whirled around at how loud Sapnap had carelessly shouted that, flipping him off only to earn a menacing laugh from his best friend.



Dream kept his head down, walking past groups upon groups of people before getting to the end of the field. Walking through the quaint forest until the sound of streaming water from the river entered his range.

And until he found *him*. Sat on the ground, knees brought to his chest with his chin resting on his crossed forearms, George looked almost childlike; innocent and docile—peacefully staring at the water, yet brows furrowed in concentration.

Dream almost felt bad interrupting, so lowering his tone the best he could, he took a small step forward. “Hey.”

George’s head shot in his direction until he relaxed in his spot at the sight of him; *who are you avoiding, then?*

“Hi.” His voice was near inaudible over the water, but Dream had caught it; his hearing tweaked to the brunet’s specific tone.

“What are you...doing out here?” Dream forced a chuckle, but it came out frail.

George brought his legs closer to his chest; Dream almost wondered if he’d be sitting so directly on the dirt were he not wearing his training attire.

A combination of clothes that he’d seen on all the other soldiers, yet none of them doing it justice like George did; in a way that had Dream struggling to keep his eyes off how it hugged the brunet’s physique perfectly.

“Can I sit?” Dream asked quietly.

George pulled his lips from where they rested against his forearm to carelessly say. “It’s your realm.”

Dream smiled to himself, nodding. He took a seat next to him, keeping a few inches of space between them as he, too, overlooked the water.

“What’s, uh...” Dream bit his bottom lip, hiding a smile. “...what’s so important out here that it took you away from training?”

George kept his eyes fixed on the water, the glistening stream due to the rays of sun expanding over the surface had the brunet squinting slightly. “Trying to make water move.”

Dream suppressed a laugh, glancing over at him; loose chocolate strands flopped over the curvature of his crown, the way it always sat, in a way Dream found disgustingly admiring—disgust towards himself for having it so bad for this pretty man sulking next to him.

“Any luck?”

George pursed his lips before he slowly shook his head.

Sebastian’s words from yesterday came flooding back rudely, “*He’s in possession of Anthea’s powers.*”

“Have you been able to before?”

‘He probably doesn’t even know how to use them.’

George shook his head once again; this time, however, the look in his eyes went from unfazed to slightly ashamed.

Is that why you ran off here? Dream watched George turn his head away from him, the rustling leaves occupying the head of the trees above them sounding through. *You didn’t want to be the only one not doing anything?*

Not knowing how to do anything? Dream winced slightly as his mindset came back to haunt him. *You need to sort this out, George.* He wanted to say, angry with himself for even thinking of asking such a thing from him.

You put him in this situation. Dream straightened his posture. *You sort it out for him.*

“Do you...want...to learn how?” Dream asked, earning his eyes in a nanosecond.

George remained silent, but his eyes waved over Dream’s features; expression unreadable to the naked eye, but not to Dream, who detected slight interest and attentiveness in the brunet’s fair countenance.

Convince him, idiot. Dream cleared his throat. “Sapnap, my...uh, guard?” George’s eyes flickered down to the space between them, but he continued to listen. “When I first met him, he didn’t know how to use his powers. We found out it was just this...mental blockade that was stopping him from generating the fire within him?” He smiled faintly at the memory. “It took a few weeks, but...I managed to...to get rid of it. And,” He drew in his bottom lip, sensing the slight shift in the brunet’s gaze. “I mean, you’ve seen him fight today, so.”

George paused for a moment before he turned his head to the water, glaring at the shining surface.

Try again. Dream took in a deep breath, eyes faltering on the brunet. “Your Majesty,” He breathed out, almost defeatedly. “The last thing I want to do is to...come off as boastful or...cocky, but.” His words halted when George meekly turned his head, side-eyeing him. “I’m the best warrior in this kingdom and I am still scared to my core about going up against The Nether.” He quickly admitted, not focusing on the former statement, but the latter.

George fully turned his head to face him, eyebrows slightly quirked.

Dream leaned into his side without thinking, their shoulders nearly touched. “I know you want to avenge your mother, so I want you to be at your optimal best when going up against the person responsible for her...” He trailed off, not finding a reason to flat out say it. “...and I am more than positive I can do that for you.”

George looked away once again, with no sign of compliance or agreement.

“Just...think about it.” Dream placed his palms into the ground, readying himself to stand. “The offer doesn’t have an expiry date.”

He waited a moment before standing up, dusting himself off before he began heading back the way he came until *he* spoke.

“When?” George asked through a near-whisper.

Dream wasn't confused, wasn't going to ask for reiteration; it was clear as to why he was hiding out here instead of attempting to learn in the open field.

Looking over his shoulder at him, Dream smiled faintly; a wave of relief washed over him as he replied easily. "After training? Today?"

George looked up at him, they locked eyes for a brief moment; Dream could have sworn his breathing momentarily halted at the sight of those eyes.

And then George nodded.

Accepted the request and offer.

And Dream was fucking elated.

Because if he couldn't stop his father from changing Salacia's battle plan, Dream would sacrifice hours upon hours, regardless of how tiring it was going to be, in order to ascertain that George was to come out of that battle nearly untouched.

Chapter End Notes

how the /fuck/ do people write good chapter summaries.

this took a minute to get up. that's my bad. i've never struggled so hard with a chapter before ahah.

but qnf are angsty, dnf is lingering in our midst, and everything is going according to plan.

can't wait to write more of this! also, don't picture dream being 'kinda...' while training and fighting to derivakat's fireborn. i did and now im in shambles.

see u soon my little brainrotters x

Avalanches

Chapter Summary

Dream and George have their first 1-on-1 training, it doesn't really end well for either of them.

Chapter Notes

honourable mention to my beta reader [thecrowmourner](#) , thank you for your ongoing service, beloved. x (:

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



The field became less and less populated as the training session neared its end. The creeping absence of people made it easier for Dream to spot George, who had reunited with his friends.

Seemingly interested in a conversation he was not involved in, Dream was pulled from the trance under Sapnap's touch. "Why are you watching him like a hawk?"

Dream rolled his eyes, jutting his shoulder upward to rid of Sapnap's hand. "You wouldn't have known that if *you* weren't watching *me* like a hawk."

"You say that like I oughta be ashamed. 'Course I'm watching you, baby." Sapnap poked the blonde's rib, sending him a cunning wink.

Dream snorted, a laugh escaping past his lips. "You're such an idiot."

Sapnap waved him off, shielding his eyes from the sun blaring down on them. "Sun's about to set. You ready for dinner? I'm fucking starved."

Dream scratched the back of his neck, contemplating how to word the fact that he was to stay back for George.

"What?" Sapnap huffed, looking up at him; half-annoyed at something Dream hadn't voiced out yet.

"I'm...gonna stay back, actually."

"For...?" Sapnap furrowed his eyebrows, eyes mindlessly drifting off to the brunet whose friends began walking the opposite direction of him; a mental calculation had been made, causing him to send a look Dream's way. "You're joking." He burst out into a tiny cackle. "Oh my *God*—"

"I'm just being helpful—"

"You're fucking whipped, bro." Sapnap scoffed, a giggle emitting his curved lips. "You guys

gonna go make-out in the woods or something—”

Dream shoved him, a little too harshly, when the younger stumbled back in his step. “I’m helping him train.”

“You had three hours to do that.” Sapnap gingerly flailed his hand at the field.

“He didn’t feel comfortable training with a crowd.” Dream mumbled, offering a small shrug as he projected his gaze at the grass.

“And how’s that your problem?” Sapnap ducked his chin, searching for Dream’s eyes whilst wearing a taunting smirk. “It’s *not*. That’s the right answer.”

Dream rolled his eyes. “I’m to conduct training. I’m only doing as I’m told.”

“During *training hours*.” Sapnap tilted his chin upwards. “Ain’t no one asked you to offer after-hours.”

“Well, I am.” Dream huffed, half-annoyed.

Only mildly irritated because he *knew* what he was doing this for. It wasn’t so much about George as it was about making himself feel less guilty for putting the king in this situation.

“Your Majesty.” Sapnap bowed his head and it was then that Dream noted the brunet’s sudden appearance.

Eyes still dancing on Dream, whose own had strung onto George, Sapnap sing-sung, “See you later, bro.”

Dream barely felt the tap on his arm from Sapnap as he continued to stare down at George, whose unfazed gaze followed Sapnap until it landed back onto Dream.

George nodded lightly at him. “Hey.”

Dream could feel the heat rise into the balls of his cheeks as he quietly replied, “Hi.”

George took a few steps forward until he stood in front of Dream, hands tucked in his pockets. “Didn’t realize training would be leading into dinner. We can reschedule if—”

“No.” Dream quickly jumped in, earning a slight expansion in the brunet’s eyes. “I mean...” He chuckled lightly. “...I usually skip collective dinner, most nights. Heat dials down slightly, so I find it’s the best time to get in some outdoor training before nightfall.”

George’s eyebrows shot up slightly before he diverted his gaze to the ground.

“Unless...*you* would like dinner?” Dream slowly asked, faced with chocolate locks crowned in gold.

George shook his head, scarcely shifting on his feet; the ground becoming his focal point.

“Cool.” Dream’s voice fell to a whisper, eyes taking notice of the small freckles lining George’s cheek; it was the bit of his face he could see from his standpoint. “...Cool.”

“Cool,” George repeated, and if Dream looked a little closer, he could almost see a slight upturn at the corner of his lips.

“Um.” Dream chuckled nervously, crossing his hands behind his back. “I was thinking...” He trailed off, losing retention on his own thoughts the longer he looked at him.

George finally looked up and Dream’s eyes ever-so-slightly widened. “Thinking....?”

Dream straightened his posture. *Get it together, dude.* “I was thinking we should start with basic...um, fighting techniques? Assuming you’ve never...fought or trained.”

Unbothered by the assumption, George easily replied, “I have not.”

“Just because it’s gonna help generate your fighting instinct. And elemental powers are a little more complex. It’s more mind over muscle. But it’s up to you.” Dream released a breath he had forgotten to take through his hastened words. “...Obviously.” His eyes fluttered shut as he mentally reprimanded himself.

George’s lips cracked a soft smile that was swiftly directed at the ground.

An awkward smile formed on Dream’s face as he looked down at him. “What?”

George shook his head. “You don’t have to justify yourself.” He looked up, almost taking Dream aback. “You’re in charge here.”

Dream wasn’t sure which part had created a short circuit in his course of breathing, but he paused on his words for an amount of time he didn’t know he needed; maybe he wanted to swim in the possibility that someone like George had even a fraction of trust in him.

Regardless of what it was, it made Dream feel good.

“Alright.” Dream cleared his throat, regaining his composure. “Uh...” He reached behind for the handle of his blade with an ease that came with a habit, pulling it from where it was slotted in his harness. “...here.” He extended the sword to the brunet who only looked down at it in slight wonder.

With his eyes darting over the weapon as if it were the first time he’d seen one, Dream almost grew amused.

Dream stifled a smile. “That’s a sword, by the way.”

George’s eyes flew from the blade, shooting him a sharp glare before taking it from his grasp; the confidence that had previously been coursing through Dream to be comical had slipped through him when the sides of their palms brushed at the transfer.

Shifting it from his right hand to his left, George’s brows knitted, twirling the apex of the blade into the dirt. “What will you use?” He asked, eyes lining the edge of the steel.

Dream had been too lost in adoration to have answered right away; admiring the brunet’s interest at the feel and sight of the weapon.

And holy fuck. Dream’s eyes waved over the thick metal handle wrapped by dainty and porcelain fingers. *His hands are so delicately tiny.*

George kept his chin tucked, looking up at Dream expectantly through his lashes, causing the blonde to perk up as he realized he’d been awaiting his response.

“Nothing?” Dream’s shoulders went up slightly into a hesitant shrug.

George paused on him for a moment before he looked down at the blade again.

Dream cleared his throat once more, shaking himself out of his thoughts. “Alright.” *This is what you do. You train people. This is the one thing you’re good at.* “Let’s see your stance.”

George looked up at him, fixing his gaze this time; eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

“Your fighting stance?” Dream corrected with similar confusion.

George shifted on his feet before lifting the sword slightly, Dream noted the added effort. Admittedly, the weight of the steel was adjusted to Dream’s strength, so he wasn’t considering that a setback for the brunet.

Bringing the blade horizontally between them, his left foot planted forward while the other was placed back, George’s gaze coated the blade; his lips parting with the small breath he took before he stirred his eyes up to Dream.

And Dream *was* going to praise him for touching every aspect of a proper stance until he noticed *something*.

“What?” George asked through a quiet breath; for the first time, seeming unsure of himself.

Dream bit his bottom lip before breaking into a frail, toothy smile. “You’re left-handed.”

And so was she. Dream quickly suppressed the memory, concealing his skeletons behind the closet door.

George’s jaw tensed, his lips flapping shut before he re-opened them. “Is that a problem?”

Dream’s brows shot up before he shook his head. “No, no. Not at all.” He chuckled lightly. “We have a few leftists in Vulcan.” He affirmed, losing George’s eyes as they fell back onto the blade. “I’ll defend with my left as well.”

George flickered his eyes up to him, seeming almost surprised that he *could* switch to a leftist fighter at the snap of his fingers.

Dream only smiled back, returning his gaze to the brunet’s stance—until they landed on the blade; unstable as his hands, which now being out of the security of his pockets, Dream noted, were shaking.

Not wanting to mention it due to the result of doing so yesterday, Dream only lifted his hand, wrapping it around the blade as he steadied it for him; allowing it to linger in his grip for a moment as his eyes travelled to those that had been following his movements.

George quickly looked away, ashamed as he was when they were at the river hours earlier.

“Good.” Dream quickly added, not wanting to augment his dishonour.

The whole point was to *help*. Regardless of how terrible he might be, Dream had to remind himself that this *wasn’t* Sappan. He couldn’t lose his patience or get angry when his time was being wasted.

Not with *him*—George falteringly looked up at him. *He was delicate even if he liked pretending otherwise.* Copper eyes hesitantly darted across Dream’s features as they awaited his next order.

Attack, Dream wanted to say.

But it wasn't obvious to him. And the longer they stood in silence; George slowly losing track of time—and himself—as he evaded eye contact, the more Dream felt bad for him.

“Uh...aim for...my neck?” Dream attempted.

George's eyebrows raised in shock. “Excuse me?”

“Or anywhere else. Just...you can just go for it.” Dream spoke through a lop-sided smile before nodding assuringly.

Dream wasn't sure what he was doing wrong, but George failed to move; remaining still as the blade went back to being unstable. The brunet's breathing was shallow, quiet, but unmeasured as his eyes began stammering down to the ground.

Not deciding or even knowing what to say, Dream lifted his hand from his side, going in to move his arm for him, but noticed the flinch that happened simultaneously; George rejecting, Dream second-thinking the move.

Dream squeezed his eyes shut, shaking his head slightly. *Try again.* He slicked his lips, releasing a small breath before directing his hand to a few inches above the handle, straying away from physical contact before wrapping his hand around it; George's eyes flicked up to the space between them as if the imagination of physical contact woke him up.

Dream kept his eyes on the brunet, bringing his other hand to the middle of the blade as he slowly began directing it in the motion he expected George to execute. Finally receiving his eyes, Dream's hands halted around the sword; their breath was caught in their shared gaze. Dream dismissed it the best he could, yet never looking away from him as he continued to direct the sword in the desired direction until the side of the blade was placed against his neck.

George's eyelids fluttered, lips parting slightly; the blade against Dream's neck grazed at his skin as the brunet's hand continued to shake. Dream slowly let go of the blade, George remained frozen in his spot; their eyes still locked in differentiating emotions.

Dream's voice was barely audible as he said, “Good.”

Are these tremors or are you scared? Dream wanted to ask as he continued to feel the scraping blade against his neck, but instead, he forced a gentle smile. “You're not going to hurt me, Your Majesty.”

And George didn't say anything, only blinked back at him in response, parted lips coming to a close. *It's both.* Dream concluded. *But mostly scared.* His eyes flickered to the rosiness in his cheeks. *What were you thinking was gonna happen?*

Dream, with no trace of malice or mockery, asked, “Should I get a sword myself? Would that...make things easier?”

George, then, retrieved his sword in a swift movement; almost as if he had exited a trance and entirely re-composed himself. “Whatever.” He mumbled under his breath, eyes turning to the ground.

Dream broke into a smile, chuckling to himself. “Okay.” He nodded, earning a mild look from the brunet. “Cool.”

“Cool.”

George turned around as did Dream who walked in the opposite direction, sporting a knowing smile as he headed to the armoury; situated underground a few meters away from where they stood.



He was so fucking annoying. George thought as he retrieved his step, grip unsteady around the handle of his blade while looking at the blonde through the wisps of his lashes. *He was so effortlessly good at this and that was so annoying.*

George was already panting, his delayed reactions and shortness of breaths vexed by all the joint smoke that had tainted his lungs over time. And he was a fucking mess all while the prince barely broke a sweat.

George's attacks were happening in interims, not quick or progressive in the slightest bit, which had the blonde barely lifting his sword to defend his attacks. And what really pissed George off was when the prince would halt his attacks *with his hand*.

Which, unlike his, were calloused and big; firm when fearlessly gripping the steel that advanced at him in an attack.

"We can take a break." The prince cautiously stated, earning George's glare in an instant. "If you want—"

"You're not trying." George deadpanned.

The blonde quirked an eyebrow, lips imperceptibly parting as he tried to get his words out. "I...I didn't think—well, this is...this is just training."

You know that's not the reason why, George wanted to say as he wavered his glare onto him. *We both do.*

George straightened his posture after being slightly leaned forward to catch his breath. "And?" He asked, slightly annoyed. "You were training earlier and you were doing—" His lips flapped shut when he noticed the small shift in the blonde's features. "...you were *trying* then."

"I just..." The blonde took a small breath, eyes flickering down to the ground for a moment before looking at George. "...I just don't think it's necessary for me to—"

"Try," George commanded before tightening his grip around the handle of the sword, bringing the blade back up to level with his chin as he readied into his fighting stance. "For real, this time."

It took him a while, a lot longer than George would've liked for him to agree, earning the blonde expectant eyes accompanied by irritation.

"Okay." He nodded, drawing up his sword as his blade met George's a few inches apart.

They began again; blades of steel clashing at a grudging pace, viridian eyes following their movements while George's flickered between the battling blades and the cautious glare of the other.

George let out a deep huff, dropping his hand as the apex of his blade scratched the grass and dirt beneath them. "You're going *easy* on me." He scowled at the blonde before shaking his head, tone much quieter this time as he sighed out, "Forget it."

“Fine. Okay.” The prince ushered, receiving umber irises. “I’ll try.”

“For real—”

“For real, this time.” He cut him off with a steady nod.

George rested his gaze on him for a moment; mentally transpiring his intention to leave in an instance were he not to genuinely try this time. The prince drew up his sword once more in response and George rolled his eyes before lifting his own to meet the opposing.

And George saw something change in the prince’s look; whether it was the slight crick in his brow or differentiation in the way his eyes seemed to focus on him, George was persuaded the blonde was going to try this time.

A breeze rolled past them in a moment of their contemplation.

“Go on,” George said under his breath.

Lowly, matching George’s tone, the blonde lightly jerked his chin at him. “You first.”

And though the prince might not have said so due to his dying need to present common courtesy, George grew impatient, re-adopting his scowl as he advanced.

George hadn’t battled or trained a day in his life, but he had observed his friends’ fighting techniques when he lingered about in the training room; mostly to purposely distract or annoy them.

So, he wasn’t entirely clueless on how to proceed.

Wanting to impose those tactics, now more than ever, onto the blonde whose demeanour had seemingly shifted, George worked those techniques into the jabs of his swords; only shortly prevailing in having the upper hand until the blonde—in a swift movement—curved his blade underneath his, knocking it out of his grasp entirely before entrapping George against a tree trunk.

George’s breath hitched when his eyes finally adjusted at the sight of the blade pressed against the column of his throat. He flicked his eyes from the edge of the steel to the blonde’s own, who in a nanosecond, lost his impulsive ferocity as he alarmingly looked at him.

And as though the prince was frozen in place, the blade continued to graze at George’s skin. “You told me to try.” He spoke through a shaky breath. “I’m sorry.”

George gulped the fear that settled within him at the previous moment where he could have sworn he saw his life flash right before his eyes. “I thought...” He swallowed the bile that rose in his throat. “...I told you to stop apologizing.”

The blonde exhaled deeply, eyes fluttering on the brunet. “I know, I’m sorr—” He bit his lip. “I wasn’t actually going to hurt you—”

“Stop. I’m fine.” George clenched his jaw, pushing down the subliminal need to combust. *Why did he suddenly feel so fucking nauseous?*

Confusion knitted the prince’s eyebrows as he scrutinized George’s features. “Are you...are you alright?”

“Told you I’m fine—”

“No, like, you’re...you’re turning pale—”

George quickly shoved the blade away from his throat, vision going momentarily blank as pushed past the prince before falling to his knees. Re-opening his eyes, he was met with the horrifying scene of his withdrawals taking the form of his breakfast in a puddle of his vomit.

“Fuck.” George uttered before spitting out the taste that remained.

“Your Majesty—”

Feeling ashamed for many reasons leading up to this very one, George scrambled to his feet before swiping the back of his palm over his lips and muttering a quiet, “I’ve to go.” Leaving the prince in shock, probably disgust, and in absolute disarray.

It was a build-up. He knew that much.

The gravel crunched beneath the soles of his boots as he tried his best to keep his footing steady on his way to the portal.

It had started from the moment he drew the blonde’s sword. The moment the prince asked him to get in his fighting stance.

George winced at his thoughts, keeping his blurry gaze fixed on the ground.

The moment the prince had to steady the blade for him because his tremors couldn’t fucking chill for one second.

He huffed, shaking his head at himself as if to disbar the thoughts.

The look of concern on the blonde’s face when he had to move the sword for him.

George silently groaned, quickly glancing over his shoulder to see if the prince could still spot him.

It was how he had no fucking clue what he was doing and how he was to be defending himself in an approaching battle—against the very people that killed his mother.

He pressed his palm against the alabaster of the portal, leaning his weight into it as he caught his breath.

Her. George squeezed his eyes shut, shaking his head once more. You. He sighed shakily. You whose knowledge surged through me when, at one point, I did know what I was doing. His eyelids flapped open as realization uneasily settled within him. Your fighting instinct, which surged through me, through our bloodline. He dropped his hand from the portal.

George saw his wobbly reflection in the animation of the portal, *the tyrant lived in all those born under Neptune.*

And George thought: *Oh, fuck.*



At the third knock, Karl swung the door open; sternum exposed by his white button-down tucked into olive green slacks, flower crown sitting comely in his chestnut hair.

“Hey, handsom—”

Greetings were cut off by George giving him a curt nod before pushing past him and progressing into the atelier; no direction in mind as he mindlessly leaned his lower back into Karl's desk.

"Good evening to you too," Karl sarcastically muttered before shutting the door. "So," He turned around, wearing that comforting smile that didn't seem to have an effect on George in the current state he was in. "What can—Jesus fuck, dude, are you alright?"

George lifted his eyes from the floorboards, unaware of how he must've looked to him. "Sorry?"

"You look out of it." Karl frowned slightly, placing his glass of whiskey on the shelf to his right. "You okay?"

"Just puked my fucking guts out." George tried to joke, only receiving a worrisome look from the younger. "M'fine." He rolled his eyes, already sensing a caring nature emitting Karl.

"Cept you're not." Karl scoffed, walking over to him until George stood up vastly.

"Yeah, look, I came here to, uh," George looked around the ground, frantic in the most calming sense. "You know."

"I...don't know." Karl stepped onto the first step leading up to his desk where George's back brushed against.

George looked at him expectantly until he broke. "Fuck's sake, Karl. C'mon."

Karl quirked an eyebrow before crossing his arms over his chest. "Spell it out for me—"

"*Don't* fucking test me right now."

George hadn't meant to speak through gritted teeth and the look of surprise on Karl's face only worsened the immediate guilt.

"I think you should leave." Karl firmly stated.

George's brows knitted as their eyes bore into each other's countenance. "Huh?"

Karl sighed, jaw squared as if *he* was the one having his patience tested. Yet George felt that if one more trialled second passed, he would absolutely lose his fucking mind.

"I'm the last person you should be taking this tone with." Karl's voice was quiet, but there was a storm brewing in his tone.

And if he had his priorities straight and his mind wasn't locked on getting high, George would've taken a step down.

Because this was a side to Karl he never wanted to be faced with. A person who no one would expect to blow a fuse because of how kind and unbothered they were. And yet a slip-up pressing down the wrong button could unleash a pile of foreign fierceness.

But then there was *this* side of George; the one who straightened his posture, gaining higher ground from where he stood up a step higher; eyes glaring down at Karl.

"Since you know what I came here for, just hand it over and I'll be out of your fucking way," George replied, breath uneasy with a tested temper.

Karl laughed, bitterly, straight in his face before stepping aside, untucking one hand from his

crossed arms before pointing it to the door behind him. “Don’t let me stop you.”

“Karl—”

“*What?*” Karl snapped, facing him once again.

“*Why are you doing this?*” George’s fists clenched from where they rested in his pockets.

“*Why?*” Karl took a step, this time reaching the platform George stood on; levelling their eyes as they stood mere inches apart. “You waltz in here, no ‘hello’, just told me you *puked* your fucking guts out, and you *demand* drugs.” His eyes darted across George’s face. “And you think I’m just gonna give them to you?”

George sucked in a sharp breath, unclenching his jaw as he tried his utmost best to compose himself. “Why the fuck wouldn’t you?”

“Holy *shit*.” Karl huffed, shaking his head as he leaned back. “I don’t even fucking recognize you right now, dude.” His jaw shifted with the vermin he tasted off the look of George.

“You’re starting to sound a lot like Quackity—”

“And was he wrong?” Karl cut him off, voice slightly raised.

George scoffed, pushing past him as he muttered. “Fuck off.”

“I knew it was bad, but I didn’t think it was this bad.” Karl shuddered, eyes softening on his friend. “You have a problem, George.”

George whirled around. “Oh, and what? You’re worried? Fucking hell, Karl. I expect this from Quackity and Niki, but *not* you.” He looked him up and down. “You’re the one person that doesn’t treat me like that. Don’t start now.”

“When should I?” Karl descended the steps, walking towards him. “Because yesterday you said it would be the last time and here you are, asking the same thing. It’s never going to fucking end, George. And if I don’t stop handing them over to you, I’m gonna be responsible when it’s far too late and when you’re already six feet under.” He stopped dead in front of him before jabbing his finger in his own chest. “Me. Not you, not anyone else. *Me*.”

“You’d be doing me a fucking favour.” George stepped forward. “You know you would, so just —”

“No.”

George shut his eyes, taking a breather. “What do you mean ‘no’?”

“I mean ‘no’,” Karl repeated, voice wavering.

“You can’t...” George breathed out shakily, suddenly losing his ground. “...you can’t just do that.”

“I can.” Karl pressed, searching for his eyes. “And I will—”

And in the heat of the moment, George’s hand moved faster than his brain could process as he fisted Karl’s shirt, pulling him into his chest. “You can’t give me drugs and then just *stop*.” His eyes veered down to Karl’s lips, which shook with their ragged breaths. “You can’t encourage this for *years* and then just *stop*. You can’t do that—you can’t just *fucking do* that.” There were tears threatening George’s eyes as fury continued to course through them. “*You* made me like this.”

Tears began escaping him, rolling down his cheek in hot flashes. “*You* did this. You’re *already* responsible for the way that I am.”

Karl sniffled, it was then that George noticed a reflection of his tears onto his friend’s face. “Don’t...” He shakily whispered, features contorted as tears rolled down his face. “...don’t say that.”

But George couldn’t think straight, desperate and already knowing that he wasn’t going to get his fix, he fisted Karl’s shirt, pulling him in closer as he shouted, “*Fuck* you, Karl.” Breath shaky and grip slowly loosening around his shirt, George continued, this time a tad bit more defeated. “Fuck you.”

Karl shook his head, slicking his lips that were glossed over by his tears. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

George dropped his forehead against his as he brokenly whimpered. “You made me this way.”

Karl wrapped his fingers around the brunet’s wrists, pressing their foreheads together. “I’m so sorry ___”

George, completely drained, dropped his hands from Karl’s shirt before wrapping his arms around him. Karl wasted no time in falling into it just as urgently, fisting the back of George’s shirt.

“I’m sorry,” George admitted through a broken-down whisper. “It just...” He squeezed his eyes shut, body shivering with sorrow. “...it hurts so much, Karl. She’s *everywhere*. Everything I see, everything I do—it all reminds me of her.”

“I know.” Karl lamented, voice nasally as he continued through a pained sob. “I know—it hurts me too.”

“I just miss her so fucking much—”

Karl tightened his hold around him. “I know.”

Sobbing a rivulet onto each other’s shoulders, the two friends emptied a tower of emotions they never concurrently projected; the sound and feel of their melancholia urging their tears.

And George, finding himself on his knees in a pit of darkness, surrounded by walls that emulated what he mindfully felt was rock bottom, admitted, “I just want my mum back.”



“*Fuck*.” Dream hissed as he pulled his wrapped fist from the leather.

The punching bag swayed back to front and Dream stared at it through a glare.

Until he went again, applying a combo that had him wincing the longer his punches progressed; every dig of his elbow and every hit bringing him closer to his limit.

“Woah, pal.” A voice called out from behind him, causing Dream to land a firm fist against the bag in order to halt its swinging entirely. “Let’s take it easy, yeah?”

“Fuck off, Sap.” Dream puffed out an indifferent laugh before turning around to face him.

“*Why* are you still training?” Sapnap furrowed his eyebrows, jogging down the steps before reaching Dream’s side.

“Wanna do Punz’s job?” Dream flicked his chin at the punching bag, bringing his fists up and getting into his fighting stance.

Sapnap snorted. “No.”

Dream dropped his fists before cocking his head at him. “Okay.” He juttied his thumb over his shoulder. “Then, bye.”

“That’s rude.” Sapnap shoved him, earning immediate retaliation from Dream.

Thus began a constant back and forth of shoves before Dream slung his arm around the shorter’s neck, putting him in a chokehold.

“Ok—ay, st-stop.” Sapnap choked out, slapping Dream’s forearm in defeat.

“You gonna keep being a bitch?” Dream asked through a smile.

Sapnap, as his response, harshly jabbed his elbow into Dream’s guts, causing the blonde to release his grip entirely so he could clutch at his stomach.

“Fuckin’ idiot.” Sapnap panted, catching his breath.

“I should knock you the fuck out for that.” Dream grunted, grimacing as he tried his best to straighten back up.

Sapnap massaged his neck, sending him a slight glare. “I literally just wanted to check in on you, asshole.”

Dream huffed, standing up straight with a hand still rubbing at his stomach. “You’re an idiot.”

“You’re a moron—how was practice with King George?” Sapnap rushed the playful insult, impatient to get his begging question answered.

“You can definitely leave now.” Dream turned around, making his way to the punching bag.

“C’mon, bro. How bad was he?” Sapnap asked through a small chuckle.

Dream scoffed, suppressing a laugh. “He was fine.”

“No, he wasn’t.” Sapnap snickered, earning Dream’s eyes in an instant when the blonde spun around to face him. “How was it, really?”

Dream paused for a moment as he watched Sapnap settle on the bench. *He was getting comfortable, might as well just humour him.*

In all honesty, Dream couldn’t stop thinking about the brunet and how he had left so abruptly. Especially having emptied his guts out onto the field, which had left Dream nearly speechless. And extremely regretful because he *should* have said something, should have stopped him from leaving.

Hence the punching bag facing all his wrath.

“He was so bad.” Dream sighed, not being able to help the smile that grew on his face the moment Sapnap exploded into a loud laugh. “*Stop.* He’s trying.” Watching the way he continued to relish into this information, Dream squinted at him. “I’ll have you know you were just as bad as him before my help.”

“Yeah,” Sapnap caught his breath. “When I was, like, eleven years old.”

“Better late than never.” Dream shrugged, eyes set on undoing his wraps.

“Right. Of course, you’re defending your little crush.” Sapnap’s giggle seized when he caught Dream’s glare from his lowered gaze before the blonde returned his attention to his wraps. “You gonna tell me why you’re actually helping him now, or?”

“Told you,” Dream tossed the bunched-up wraps of his left hand onto the bench before un-doing his right. “I’m only doing as I’m told.”

“You’re full of shit, bro. Tell me the real reason.” Sapnap leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees.

Dream tossed the used wraps onto the bench before plopping down onto the wooden surface with a huff.

It was driving him crazy, Dream thought as he fought to keep eye contact with Sapnap’s curious eyes. And telling Sapnap wouldn’t exactly hurt anyone. And out of all the people that would blame him, Sapnap would be the last.

“Dude, what?” Sapnap asked, humoured tone replaced with slight concern.

Dream groaned from across the room, dropping the back of his head against the glass as he looked at Sapnap through his lashes. “I fucked up.”

Sapnap sat up. “What do you mean?”

Dream took in a deep breath as he settled his eyes on the ceiling. “Sebastian...made it all up.”

It was too late to go back now. Dream felt his heart clench as the seconds elapsed around him and Sapnap.

“Made...what up?”

“The Nether never sent us a threat. And...they weren’t responsible for Queen Anthea’s death.” The words grew heavy in Dream’s throat, lodging in as he swallowed hard before continuing. “He—”

“What the fuck—”

“He made it all up because he just wanted to take over The Nether, but he knew he needed Salacia to fight by our side. And he thought the only way to do that was by giving them a reason—”

“Dude—”

“—And Sebastian *knew*, you know? Queen Anthea had mentioned her son’s absence throughout all those years of joint practice and training being that he wasn’t the fighting type. So, he asked *me* to convince him to fight by our side, but I didn’t do that.” Dream was rambling, and he hoped for his sake that Sapnap was keeping up because reiteration was not in question. “I went into that pub that night to convince him and did the exact opposite. I couldn’t do it, so he fucking...” He rolled his head forward to look at Sapnap. “...Sebastian took matters into his own hands.”

Sapnap’s jaw had dropped as he stared back at Dream, unconditionally astonished.

“And now King George feels the need to avenge his mother, especially after knowing—or thinking that he knows—who killed his mother. And he’s got a vendetta when he’s not even close to being

prepared to fight.” Dream finished with a broken breath.

The seed his father had implanted in his brain a couple of days ago had finally sprouted past his lips, momentarily liberating him from the ongoing hell he was isolated in.

Dream swallowed, his throat suddenly dry as he stared back at Sapnap. “Nick, say something.”

“Ye—yeah, I mean it’s *fucked*, dude.”

“It’s...” Dream blinked at him before flailing his hands at him. “It’s *‘fucked’*?”

“I don’t know what you want me to say. I...*fuck*, you’ve just...been dealing with this shit and—wait, you know that’s not on you, though, right?”

“*How*? I put him in this situation. If I had just convinced King George on my own, he would’ve just —”

“He *still* wouldn’t have agreed to the battle, Dream. And Sebastian would have probably done the same thing—conned them into thinking that The Nether was responsible for Anthea’s death when they really weren’t.” Sapnap spoke slowly, measuring his words as if he was recounting what Dream had mouth-vomited.

Dream opened his mouth to speak, but his lips flapped shut; his eyes whirled on Sapnap’s face until his vision blurred.

“Dude.” Sapnap laughed nervously. “Have you been blaming yourself this entire time? *That’s* why you’re helping him train?”

“No...I...I mean, yeah. I guess I was blaming myself, but...” Dream’s brows knitted as his gaze fell to his lap.

It wasn’t something unknown to him; his father blamed him for a lot of things in the past, things he knew, deep down, he wasn’t responsible for. But because it had happened so often, Dream couldn’t help but internalize his words, almost like he was allowing himself to believe it. Because *that* was easier, wasn’t it? Not challenging it?

Because if he fought, it would destroy him.

“Dream, you can’t—”

“But, it doesn’t matter, Sapnap.” Dream shook his head, regaining his composure. “Sebastian is gonna have him out on that battlefield and he’s not gonna know what to do.” His throat felt strained with every pumped-out word. “And you know I can’t change Sebastian’s mind, so...I have to help King George.”

“Because you’re scared he might die?” Sapnap’s voice was quiet, striking a silence to follow his deafening question.

Dream nodded. “It doesn’t matter who was to blame for Salacia fighting by our side. I’ll always feel responsible for him.”

“Dream, I know you like him, but—”

“Not for King George.” Dream flickered his eyes up to his best friend. “For my father.”

Sapnap stared back, either unsure on how to respond because he had understood or because he

hadn't, urging Dream to continue.

Dream, exasperated with a realization that had always dwindled above his subconscious, sighed out, "I've always felt responsible for cleaning up his mess."



George woke up the next day feeling like he was hungover, yet it somehow felt worse than that. With no headache or soreness, just pure irritation and depletion. He couldn't figure out which he'd prefer more; feeling the surplus of sorrow when emptying all of his repressed grief into Karl's hold or not feeling anything at all.

The feeling, or lack thereof, which he currently had as he stared blankly at the log ceiling of Karl's atelier.

As he indolently turned his head to the side, George noticed the folded piece of paper that sat like a mini-tent on the side table: *Karl left a note*. George would have smiled at that, were he not utterly fucked out of his mind from shedding so many tears he felt dehydration through every fibre of his soul.

George remembered how Karl had been last night and he winced at the memory; a broken-down version of him that pained every inch of the brunet's body. Especially when Karl admitted to having pushed down his grief the best he could because someone like Karl didn't like to face the tragic shit life had to offer.

He acknowledged them, but wouldn't work them out. Wouldn't exert energy into focusing too much on the bad. And George couldn't blame him when he knew the chestnut-haired prince had his head constantly floating through a field of daisies, evading storms that could ruin his solace.

And neither of them could wordily express how they felt; it was a sort of grief that could only be spoken through a stream of tears and tight embraces.



George was at the stove in Karl's atelier after having spent a solid hour laying on the couch in splintering silence.

He felt like a new person and not at all in a refreshing sense. He didn't feel reborn or rejuvenated.

Even after one night of properly letting every repressed feeling flow out of his mind and past his trembling lips. He just felt as if he was someone then, and now he was somewhat himself again.

Still, not in a refreshing sense.

It could have been argued that George *wasn't* dealing with his mother's passing when he was jacked up on herbs and alcohol, but George knew he was. It's what had fuelled his incentive on keeping his mind intoxicated. And now, sober as he could ever be, and possibly had been for the first in time in what felt like years, George was having to deal with his mother's passing. Again.

This mourning thing didn't have an expiry date, he knew it came in intervals. But *fuck*, if there was even a tad bit of progress during his dazed-out state, it was all gone. And he was to start this mourning process *all over again*.

Fucking sober.

George was practically burning holes into the pot boiling his water *for a fucking cup of tea.*

Tea. Not the one that had him and Karl falling into an unprompted kiss or dancing like fools to muffled music. No - just *tea*. One that slightly replenished your organs and did *good* things for your immune system.

George wanted to end it all as he poured the water into the ceramic cup, watching the tea leaves dance their way up.

'Good afternoon, handsome.

I'm off with our princess and Q for training in Vulcan. We'll see you for dinner. Eat something while I'm gone. I can already see you shaking your head at this. I mean it - eat.

Love you,

- Karl :)

PS, you look cute when you're asleep.'

George smiled against the rim of his ceramic mug, shaking his head at the postscript of his note.

Having already discussed that he was going to avoid Vulcan and any sort of training, Karl knew not to wake him. And offering his atelier for his hibernation, George couldn't be more than grateful for his endearing idiot of a friend.



Felicity had the bridge of her golden framed glasses resting on the tip of her nose, head slightly bowed and her loose dark brown strands curling around her face; brows knitted and chewing on her bottom lip as she scribbled something into her moleskin.

George lifted a knuckle to the door of her study, giving it two light taps. "Fel?"

A soft smile formed on her face just as immediate as it reflected onto George's when they met eyes.

Felicity cocked her head to the side. "Hi, lovie."

From the way she didn't seem confused or taken aback by his presence when her son and everyone else was at training, and how he was in Karl's clothes instead of his training attire, George figured she was informed, by Karl himself, that he was avoiding today's responsibilities at all costs.

George jutted his chin at her slender fingers, holding the ballpoint pen over her pages. "What you writing?"

"Ugh." Felicity lightly dropped her pen onto her notebook, the cover shutting it in as she stretched her arms out in front of her. "My...novel." She sheepishly admitted before leaning back into her seat.

George's brows shot up as he advanced into the room. "Haven't heard about that in a while." He mumbled as he plopped down on the loveseat adjacent to her desk.

She turned in her seat slightly so she could face him from where she sat. "I *guess* you could say I was all out of inspiration."

“Yeah?” George leaned his back into the couch. “What sparked *this* inspiration, then?”

There was a beat of silence where they realized they both knew exactly what, or more so, who the ‘spark’ was; a smile grew on both their faces.

Felicity giggled, glancing down at her closed notebook before looking back at him. “So. Why are you being a degenerate and skipping practice?”

George huffed lightly, eyes cast to the wooden flooring for a brief moment. “I, um.” He cleared his throat, brushing his fringe from where it obstructed his vision before glancing over at her. “I’ve been having one-on-one practice with King Sebastian’s son, the next in line...” He trailed off until he earned her nod. “Or, I suppose it’s only been one practice, but he offered to do it after regular hours and I accepted because...” He lightly grazed his fingernails against the armrest, the fabric soft against the pad of his fingers as he mindlessly watched. “...well, because he’s really good at what he does. And I need the best...help...that I can get.”

Felicity jutted her bottom lip as if she allowed the information to sink in before raising her eyebrows. “You know, I’m really proud of you.” Earning his expectant eyes, she smiled softly. “For someone who’s always fought against fighting, this is big.”

“I’m still against it, you know?” He sighed, running his ringed fingers through his hair. “I still hate the fact that I’ve given King Sebastian the ‘okay’ on initiating this battle.” He sighed, shaking his head. “I can’t...fucking stand it.”

“Then why did you?” Felicity asked, leaning forward in her seat. “Give him the ‘okay’?”

If there was one thing that made it easy for George to speak his mind so freely with Felicity was the fact that she *wasn’t* doting. She was caring, she still was this maternal figure, but not in a way that felt suffocating—not in a coaxing sense.

George figured that’s where Karl got it from—hence why he always seemed so free with *him* out of his three best friends.

“I know...you’re going to say the same thing Cole did, and everyone else has, but...” George drew in his bottom lip, “...I’m always going to blame myself for her passing.” George saw the immediate downturn at the corner of Felicity’s lips. “I watched her go into battle all the time and not once did I stop her.”

Felicity tucked a loose strand behind her ear before interlocking her fingers and placing them onto her pressed thighs. “Do you want to know why we always tell you not to blame yourself?” And she waited for his response, verbal or not before she proceeded. “As much as you think you *could* have stopped her...” She already began shaking her head. “You couldn’t have, lovie. Fighting was in her blood and she loved *every* moment of it.”

George pulled in a small breath, eyes trailing to the ground. “I just...still feel like I’m disappointing her. Hence...the practices, you know? I...I want to be the best I can be before going up against The Nether.” His jaw shifted as he rejected the title. “I want to spot the culprit on the battlefield, know what to do, and...” He bit the words back before hesitantly directing his gaze to her. “...Fel, I’ve got nothing to lose. And the second I see the man who killed my mother, I will kill him myself—if it’s the last thing I do.”

Felicity took her glasses off, folding the stems before placing them on her desk.

George’s eyes fluttered shut. “Sorry. That’s messed up, I know.”

“No, not all. And you shouldn’t be.” Felicity chuckled lightly before offering him a light smile. “Look, we *do* both have *so much* to lose, but you know what?” She leaned forward, forearms pressed onto her thighs. “I would do the *exact* same thing.”

George hid his smile, eyes shifting down to his lap before he shyly looked over at her again.

“Hey.” Felicity merely looked down at the sleeves of her cardigan, tugging the ends into her fists, before she looked at him. “We are going to find that man, the man whose eyes she last looked into, and we are going to kill him.” Her tone was frosted in ice, while still sounding assuring. “But it will *not* be the last thing we do.”

“I can’t...” George swallowed, shaking his head before re-directing his eyes to his lap. “...I can’t go on with my life knowing that I’ve killed a man, Fel.” He picked at the loose thread of Karl’s sweater. “I can’t do it.”

Felicity chuckled, causing George to look up at her in a flash. “You haven’t changed one bit, despite everything that’s happened.” Her smile was gradual as was George’s confusion. “You’ve always tried seeing the good in people, it’s one of the things I love the most about you.” She bit the inside of her cheek, squinting at him slightly. “But, my sweet boy...this man—*whoever* he is, *he* is responsible for your *mother’s* passing.”

“Yeah, but,” George’s shoulders fell with his discouraging realization. “Killing him...it won’t fulfill or fix anything, will it?”

Felicity’s lips pursed into a sad smile. “Maybe not.” She shrugged, causing George to look away from her, slightly annoyed. “But it’ll be the most satisfying fucking thing.” Her lips cracked into a grin when she received George’s gaze, accompanied by a tug at the corner of his lips. “You want to know what really avenging her entails? It’s to persevere, my angel.” She rolled her eyes when he rolled *his* eyes at her. “Hey, look at me.” She giggled softly, earning reluctant amber irises. “Anthea didn’t raise a kid that just gives up, nor did she befriend someone who would let that happen.”

George’s eyelids fluttered as he began to feel prickling tears surface.

“She would want us to fight—and not just bloodshed, but...to fight through everything.” George listened, but he knew if he were to look over at her, he would not be able to fight back the tears. “And because she *knows* we’re capable. And you know *very* well she’s watching our every move from her throne, up there.”

The smile she sported when George looked over soothed his restraints. “Yeah?” He spoke through a mild smile.

“Yeah.” Felicity straightened her posture in her chair, balls of her palms digging atop her knees as she continued to gently gaze at him. “So, here’s what we’re gonna do,” George broke into a terse, but breathless chuckle. “We’re gonna find that bastard and we’re going to kill him. And then guess what?” George smiled, jerking his chin at her, allowing her to proceed. “We’re going to *move*. *On.*”

“For her?”

Felicity gave him a firm nod as she said, “All for her.”

And the word ‘kill’ and the sheer image of him piercing a blade through a human, produced an unsettling feeling to crawl under his skin, but Felicity was undoubtedly right.

Because if George remained resentful towards this godforsaken kingdom and everything it stood for, he would never be able to liberate himself from his growing, internal hell. And perhaps that was the very chain link around his mental blockade, enclosing his elemental powers.

And though his mother would've wanted him to live on, he still wasn't ready to let go of his relationship with inexistence.

And that was alright.

Because Felicity didn't need to know that, no one did; he just needed to do what he wanted: avenge her. And what was to come afterwards was to come with time; time he wouldn't mind not living through.



Dream still wasn't over the fact that the *King* of Salacia puked on his training field and left as if nothing had happened.

He could sense something was wrong the moment he'd refuse wine at the meeting, and furthermore with the trembling of his hands, which seemingly continued when he had trouble steadying his blade.

That, he knew—not only from second-hand experience but context clues—that it was heavy signs of withdrawals. Though he had not known him for long, it didn't take a rocket scientist to know the brunet relied heavily on drugs and alcohol to get him by.

What was hard for Dream to tell, however, was what exactly was going through his head when he was scared to fight. Because admittedly, he must have seen his friends practice and train, so he would have picked up on *some* tactics.

And though, at times, he wasn't entirely clueless—George looked *scared*. Fear laced with a twinge of shame; almost as if he could envision what would happen were to genuinely apply himself, but also knowing, that for being in his position, he didn't know as much as he should.

Dream had accepted the fact that he had it bad for George a few days ago, maybe even the first time they properly met, so the fact that he was at his doorsteps, fist rising and falling from the door as he hesitated to knock, came as no surprise to him.

Fuck it. Dream lifted his fist once more, knuckles brushing against the cold slab of wood; almost ice cold from the freezing temperature jacketing the realm.

Just as he went to knock, it clicked open. And *good fucking God*—"Hey." George; fully dressed in his training attire, and still sporting that goddamn crown.

Dream released a breath, one he barely noticed taking the moment they met eyes. "Hi."

"You're...here—"

"I am."

George was expressionless as always and Dream almost hated him for still looking pretty with dead eyes and lax lips.

"I was gonna come to you." George's hand slipped from the doorknob before it disappeared into the warmth of his pockets.

You were going to see me. You were going to come to me.

Dream, being the nervous wreck he always was around him, chuckled nervously as he said, “Beat you to it.”

George stared back blankly and Dream genuinely wanted to dissipate into thin air.

“I wanted to see how you were doing...” Dream began, trailing off as he searched the brunet’s countenance. “...you didn’t come to practice yesterday and last I saw you...you were sick on my training field.”

“I would apologize for that, but it’s just grass, isn’t it?” He spoke so quietly, yet his tone matched that of the temperature, which continued to unsettle Dream the longer he stood outside. “I do, however, feel...sort of bad...about unpromptedly leaving.”

“You were ill, Your Majesty. Do not feel bad.” Dream reassured, crossing his hands behind his back.

George blinked at his statement before jutting his chin down in a half-nod. Dream took that moment to drink in as much as he could from his silence that, if he listened closely enough, spoke a million things about how he felt.

“So, shall we?” George asked, breaking the silence.

Dream snapped out of his scrutinizing trance, eyebrows knitting with his developing confusion. “Shall we...?”

George quirked an eyebrow. “Training.”

Dream wanted to say, *‘You, of all people, would not want to be training at ten in the morning’*.

“Unless you can’t—”

“I can—we can.” Dream ushered before his lips flapped shut.

Dream also wanted to say, *‘I stayed up late at night training by myself and I am sore to hell and back, so maybe not.’* But when this emotionally distant pretty boy was the one asking, how could Dream voice such a thing.

And Dream wasn’t sure if he was looking too much into it, but was this not George warming up to him? Or at least, having a twinge of trust in him? Because he was so terribly bad at fighting, but still willing to present his efforts in front of him?

Or maybe that’s just because you’re the best warrior in the kingdom and an inexperienced king would want the best training.

But could he not have asked his guard, who as much as he hated to admit, was a pretty decent warrior himself.

Stop reading into this, you moron. Dream cleared his throat as he stepped aside to clear a path for the brunet.

And George smiled at that.

He smiled, one where Dream could see the balls of his cheekbones through a faint pink hue as he bowed his head lightly, shielding a pretty sight like it was a privilege for one to witness such a

thing—and Dream couldn't blame him.

“Gonna hold the door open for me as well?” George mumbled, curved lips speaking to the ground.

Dream stepped forward to reach for the door so as to hold it open, but George looked up at him in an instant—seizing the blonde's actions.

“That was a joke, Your Highness.” George was so obviously suppressing a smile as his eyes danced with Dream's own.

Didn't realize you were capable of making those, Dream thought.

Dream's eyelids fluttered shut as he felt a familiar warmth rise in his now-defined cheekbones. “Right.”

Dream wondered what had changed from yesterday to now, but every now and then, he'd glance at George—noticing how he resembled a priceless, but cracked vase—and *every now and then*, Dream would pick up a piece, one where he could see the reflection of what the artifact resembled before it had shattered into millions of little pieces.

Yet it was still so foreign, George's tone emulating a smile when he teasingly asked, “You alright?”

Dream glanced up at him, smile growing slightly before he swiftly turned on his heel, “I'm alright.” Leading them to the portal, and not dismissing the faint breath he heard from George—which if Dream wasn't entirely mistaken, sounded like a quiet laugh.

Chapter End Notes

hi, hi, hi! hello.

apologies, for the delay. midterm season has me a little <3 homicidal <3

hope you enjoy this one! next one is gonna be mainly dnf centred. you love to see it.
have a good one. bye! x

Common Tongue

Chapter Summary

Three days of consecutive training sessions implement change between Dream and George: whether or not it's effective in their relationship is still undecided as time escapes them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Regular training was soon approaching, but the two men were lost in the chaotic resonance of their battling swords; clashing steel and punched-out grunts past dry lips.

Every now and then the breeze which rolled past carried the prince's scent over to George; musky firewood interlaced and not a hint of perspiration, unlike George, whose forehead sported droplets of sweat.

He wasn't getting remotely tired, George pushed the side of his sword into the prince's own, *and he looked almost...bored.*

"Fuck this." George huffed, withdrawing his sword.

The blonde blinked back the thoughts trailing behind his distant eyes. "What—"

"We're wasting time." George shook his head, shedding the self-disgust.

"It's only the second day of training, Your M—"

"And tell me how I've improved." Their gaze locked; harsh copper colliding with softened virescence. "You can't."

"With all due respect, you've never trained before and this is just the second session, Your Majesty."

Words halting at the tip of his tongue, George realized it was the first time he'd heard someone imply respect and actually follow through with it. He wondered how the prince knew to do that, while still expressing his frustration in the most calming sense.

A part of him wondered: *your father?*

But George was stubborn. Through constant reminders from his three friends, George knew he could be difficult.

"I haven't made a *fraction* of progress since I got here. It's...it's been three hours." George crossed his arms over his chest, lightly hanging his head to cease eye contact.

Fucking hell, man. George squeezed his eyes shut. *You're losing your cool.*

And he knew what urged his irritation and energy in putting up a fight. Was he dazed out by traces of alcohol or herbs, he would have just reluctantly picked up his sword and started again.

No, if he *was* under the influence, he wouldn't be here in the first place.

But since he *was* sober, his patience was thinning with every thrust of his blade. And it all brought him closer to craving the burn of alcohol down his throat or the suffocating blunt smoke through his lungs.

"We've got two to three months before the battle." The prince's voice was quiet—had been quiet—through this exchange, which earned him demure brown eyes.

Matching his tone to soft viridian eyes and an opposing sorry expression he couldn't quite understand the reason behind, George mumbled, "S'not enough time."

The lack of dispute to follow ascertained a mutual agreement on what had last been said.

Another breeze rolled past them and George wanted to throw *another* fit: one would appreciate a breeze when Vulcan carried the heat of a fucking oven, but the gusts only pushed hot air, increasing his dismay, but probably causing no trouble to the tall blonde that stood before him.

"Alright." The prince slipped his sword in the slot of his harness as he turned on his heel. "Come with me."

George caught his eyes as the prince glanced down at him before walking past, headed in the direction he had when retrieving a sword for himself on the first day of training.

There was an edge to the blonde's tone, one he didn't possess when they weren't on the training field. The duality would awaken something in George. Because off the training field, the prince would be more docile and accommodating.

And George liked it. Liked the way the prince looked at him with kind eyes and nervous smiles. Liked how the prince acted as if he didn't have a mean bone in his body, despite the fact that he had come off as cocky on Neptunalia and had admitted to killing people in battle.

George wasn't sure if it was his narcissism, revelling in the way the prince fired his ego only a fraction when he stumbled over his words, seemingly blushing at his appearance.

And George liked it. But he liked the contradicting even more; the prince's slip-ups: smart remarks spoken under his breath, or moments in which he took full control because of how comfortable he was with a weapon in his hand.

George followed him into the underground armoury—where the lighting got dim: a torchy-lit room with cobblestone walls dressed in hung-up swords and shields; some newly crafted, some tarnished, having faced the wrath of a battle.

The prince seemed occupied with unlocking a set of cupboards, George left him to it as he progressed into the room.

There was an anvil sitting on a four-foot cubed brick; George walked over to it, eyes still waving over the walls before they landed back on the anvil—and then he saw it. Saw the engraving that read '*Dream*'.

Dream. George furrowed his eyebrows, brushing the pad of his forefinger over the lettering; written messily as if it had been carved with a small knife. *Who the fuck names an anvil?*

Vulcan people are so odd.

“Sorry, it’s a little cold in here.” The prince’s voice drew George from scribbling his mental notes; he lightly looked over his shoulder to where the blonde stood, a set of keys sat in his palm before he pocketed them in his puffer jacket. “And a little dark.”

Him and his fucking ‘sorry’s.

“It is dark,” George stated, unable to help the smile that formed with his imminent words. “But you do realize you’re apologizing for the cold to someone who lives in a Winter biome.”

The prince’s eyelids fluttered shut—the way they always did when he was cursing himself out, so it seemed. “Right, yeah.”

George was about to ask about the engraving on the anvil until the prince cleared his throat, earning his attention before his eyes landed on the door to the cupboard revealing a series of weapons; one of which had been removed from its spot. The ring of the weapon twisted around the blonde’s finger, engaging the leaf-shaped blade in a continuous circular spin.

“We have two to three months to prepare. And that *isn’t* enough time. *You*,” The blade stopped mid-spin before it was pointed at George, “Are absolutely right about that,” The brunet purposely downturned his lips to stop the smile that begged to show itself following the blonde’s unintentional theatrics. “And that reminded me of when Sapnap had trouble adjusting to daggers, which is what he started on. It didn’t fit his fighting style, slowed down training for the both of us.”

George noted how Sapnap’s name was always accompanied with a light, endeared smile, and he immediately thought of Quackity, which made him wonder if the blonde’s relationship with Sapnap was like his and Quackity’s.

And then he thought of how they were currently not on speaking terms due to their pettiness. They had gone longer than three days without speaking to each other, but the elongation of their silence was never based on pure hatred—just a bet on who was to be the bigger person and break their silent streak first.

And when he caught Quackity glancing over at him during last night’s dinner, George thought—*this is fucking ridiculous. I miss talking to you.*

The prince’s voice lured George into reality, “We gave him a sword and he was so much more comfortable. Performed so well at such a rapid pace.” He desisted, the flames from the torches reflecting onto their eyes. “We need to find your weapon of choice, Your Majesty.”

George’s gaze drifted from the prince’s face to the weapon that had returned in its rhythmic rotation. “And you’re thinking it’s *that* thing?” He jutted his chin at it and the spinning stopped.

The prince smiled *that* smile again. “It *could* be.” In a flash of a second, the weapon was tossed in the air and George was thankful he had already been paying attention to have caught it, by a mere pinch. “Only one way to find out.”

Their eyes met: George’s slightly widened, the blonde’s own cinched at the corners.

George looked down at the leaf-shaped blade; almost holographic. He slid his forefinger in the ring, engaging it in a swirl before levelling its apex with his eyes.

From where it was held up, George just had to shift his eyes to catch the prince looking at him attentively. “It’s called a Kunai.”

"I like it." George quietly stated before setting the Kunai in motion once again. "But I..." He drew the blade down, finger still hooked around the ring as he laid the soft iron in his free hand. "...Can I be...honest, with you," He looked over at him. "Your Highness?"

Voice as soft as cotton, the prince replied, "Of course." His brows furrowed as if the question was futile, yet a taunting tone was undetectable.

And George wasn't sure how he'd come to the conclusion of telling him the truth, especially when it was something he'd been self-conscious about ever since training sessions had started, but who else would he tell if not him?

The prince was essentially his trainer; he was to prepare him for battle, he was to know his fighting style.

"I'd like to stray away from...direct fighting." George's voice was as low as his confidence in a moment of vulnerability that he wished he wasn't sober to suffer through. "At least until the only man that's left on the battlefield is the man who killed my mother. I will face him directly, but at the start of battle, I want to...I want to stay back. A little."

George hated having hope for the very reason of the look that followed his confession; the blonde seemed to have frozen in his spot, a thought had stolen his attention. And the regret in having hope, at that moment, was that he'd hope—with how the prince was ever-so putty in his hands and doting at all times—that he wouldn't have wasted a second to reassure him.

And almost as if shame, sheathed by the ice in his tone, fuelled by his anger for having been too open, George said, "Unless that's a problem—"

"No, it's not. I didn't mean to...it's completely fine, Your Majesty. Um," A frantic expression was replaced by his back which George was now faced with when the prince searched for something in the cupboard of weapons. "We also have daggers, throwing knives, uh," Sounds of clanking blades sounded through the room as George continued to question his behaviour. "These are shurikens." He turned around, holding star-like blades with a punctured hole in the middle. "You throw them."

George shot him a small look, almost all of his confusion and preset anger had vanished. "No shit."

Almost as if a sheet of tension had flown off, unsealing them, the blonde scoffed a terse laugh. "You referred to a Kunai as *that thing*, you can't really blame me here."

George forced down the smile that was procured from a hint of the prince's raw personality; the humour and confidence that exuded off his tongue when he would momentarily forget the hierarchy ruling his predetermined courtesy.

"Whatever," George mumbled under his breath.

They locked eyes again for a brief moment until the prince cocked an eyebrow at him. "I'm not gonna throw you this one." He extended his hand, the shuriken slotted in the space of his middle and forefinger.

"Funny," George walked towards him, warmth settled in-between their hovering hands when the brunet's fingers pinched the shuriken from the blonde's loose grip. "Could've sworn I heard you say you're *meant* to throw these, but..." He shrugged, hiding his smirk as he lightly yanked the compact weapon from the blonde.

"Doubt you'd have been able to catch them in the first place, but." The prince said under his breath

when George had his back to him.

Looking over his shoulder, George raised a challenging eyebrow.

The prince immediately bit on his bottom lip, seeming only half sorry and still wearing a clever smile. “That was uncalled for. I’m so sorry.”

George rolled his eyes before turning his head to face the wall ahead. “Stop apologizing and train me—how the fuck do you go about this?”

He could have sworn he’d heard a snicker leave the prince’s vicinity, urging a smile George was happy he could hide with his back to him. “I need your index finger on the tip of one blade and your thumb over the circle.” He ordered; George found himself pulling a face when he felt the returning churn in his stomach whenever the prince was ordering him. “And then aim at that wall and just—”

Wanting to get rid of the recurring but unfamiliar feeling towards the prince’s commands, George didn’t think twice before flicking his wrist, sending the shuriken off in a straight line before the apex of the blade wedged itself flawlessly in the crevice of the cobblestone walls.

“What the f—”

“Like that?” George turned around, forcing coolness in his tone as he waited for the exact reaction the prince held: withdrawn lips and widened eyes.

“You...” The prince kept shifting his gaze from the shuriken to George. “... *how?*”

“What’d you mean—”

“You barely took your time to aim and got it right in the crevice—”

“It’s just physics.”

“It’s...” The prince blinked at him. “...*just* physics?”

Though a part of George *had* tried to impress him, it hadn’t taken him much effort to do so; he had been praised for his impeccable aim before, but never thought too much of it: how far could good aim really get someone? And he thought that for the longest time, until this very moment.

Because as the prince turned around to walk back to the cupboards, opening a new door to reveal bows and arrows, George realized that having good aim might be the sole reason behind his prevalence in battle.

Because what weapon epitomized fighting from afar while still causing collateral damage?

“So...in the background with flawless aim...” The prince’s relieved features contained a light grin as he held the door open to the weapons on display. “...bow and arrow or crossbow, Your Majesty?”



With every elapsing second, Dream was reaching the summit of his threshold.

I need to tell you something. He’d think whenever he would glance at George, who walked beside him in silence as they returned to the training field. *My father’s a fucking moron and he’s going to have you on the frontline.* George caught him looking and Dream pretended he wasn’t, squinting

his eyes at the view ahead; he heard a breathless scoff escape the brunet. *I am so sorry.*

“You’re going to be using your shield, right?” George asked, luring him out of his thoughts.

Dream peeked back to reality, glancing down at him again as they stopped in the middle of the field. The sun’s placement in the sky indicated midday meaning they had about a half-hour left.

And Dream kept thinking, *just tell him.* But even days wouldn’t suffice for the mental preparation needed for the delivery of his confession.

Yet he trusted you with his. “Your Highness?” George searched for his eyes, voice monotonous as it was most of the time, while his actions differed slightly.

“Yes. Got it right here.” Dream forced a smile, lifting up the shield in between them.

George’s eyes followed it before Dream brought it back down. “Cool.”

“Cool.” Dream’s feigned smile covered the ordeal of his thoughts, which had then diluted into a genuine one when he drank in the brunet’s expression: hesitant and scared, veiled over by his perpetual need to seem unfazed. “Alright,” He clapped his hands. “I’ll set up the target so we can measure your aim first. You stand here? Get in position?”

Dream was about to turn on his heel to follow through with the setup until George stared back at him as if nothing he said had gotten transpired across.

Looking down at the bow in his hand, turning it over with a grip on the bow sight, George looked utterly lost and it tapped Dream the fuck out. *You’re not making this easy on me, George,* he thought as a wave of remorse washed over him, urging the downturn at the corner of his lips. *All I wanna do is make sure you’re going to be okay out there.*

“You, um,” Dream cleared the hoarseness from his throat as he stepped forward, earning George’s eyes in an instant. “Can I...” He lifted his finger to the arrows’ fletching that peeked over his shoulder, receiving a curt nod from the brunet who had his gaze wavering on his. “Okay.” He nodded back and reached over his shoulder.

Dream kept his eyes on him; holding his breath as if George resembled towered play cards and the wrong move could have them topple over. Withdrawing an arrow from the case slung over George’s tense shoulder, Dream slid the pad of his thumb and forefinger to line it as he waited for the brunet’s attention, which had travelled down ahead—fixed on the blonde’s chest as if he didn’t dare to look up.

There was that look of shame again, one that Dream was sure George would never want pointed out, so he dropped his gaze and walked around to meet the brunet’s side. “Can you hold your bow up for me, please?” He asked, voice so quiet the breeze that passed through almost overpowered it.

George lifted his bow, hand placements showcasing an inexperienced archer. And then he waited for his next order in silence. Dream’s eyes never left the fraction of his face he could see from where he stood behind and to the side of him; he hovered his arm around him to pass the arrow in his dominant hand.

George’s sigh was quiet, but from their proximity, Dream had heard it. The brunet took it from his hold, filing it so the arrow’s nock was pressed loosely against the arrow rest of the bow.

“You’re good, just, um.” Dream kept his voice calm, not speaking too close to him as he feared his

breath would expand onto his neck. “Your hand is on the bow sight.” And his breath nearly hitched when George glanced over his shoulder and up at him. “It needs to be on the grip.” Following his hand which shifted down from the bow sight to the limb bolt, George looked at Dream for confirmation, *but that wasn’t it.*

Dream pressed his lips into a thin line, ignoring the breeze that carried George’s expensive cologne to him; momentarily taunting him and likely to linger in his subconscious for when the brunet would return home.

Dream lifted his hand, hovering it just above George’s. And when his question had been silently proposed and granted through their briefly locked gaze, Dream finally placed his hand over George’s.

And holy shit. They simultaneously jerked at the touch. *His hand was so cold, not as cold as his rings; the stainless steel thriving off his innate element.* But his hand—his hand emitted a feeling so immense despite how small it was, almost lost under the size of Dream’s own.

Move. Dream forced the feeling down the best he could, lifting George’s hand with the care he didn’t know his own hands possessed, before placing it where it needed to be.

“There we go.” Dream retrieved his hand, quickly pocketing it. *Holy fuck. Holy fuck. Holy fuck.* “Now, um. Uh, just—” He took a breath, relaxing before fixing his gaze on the brunet, noticing the way his shoulders were still tense; unsure if it was the warmth that encased the brunet, Dream still noticed a slight rosin in his cheek. “Relax.” He coaxed, his own breath coming down with George’s faltering shoulders. “Set?”

“Mhm.” George nodded, fixing his eyes on the bow sight.

Dream stared intently before shifting his gaze at the tree trunk meters ahead. “Draw back.” Hearing the stretch and twitch of the bowstring, he finally ordered, “Shoot.”

With not even a shred of calculation, George’s arrow surged from the bowstring and coursed through the air, striking the tree trunk in a harsh hit.

An audible breath exhaled past their lips; George dropped his hand to the side, still clutching onto the bow as he glanced up at him and Dream could have sworn even the Vulcan heat couldn’t melt him as much as *that* smile did.

“So?” Dream tone dwelled in adoration the further he looked at him. “What are we thinking?”

George ducked his head, twisting the bow in his grip. “S’good.” He quietly said.

Dream could hear the smile in his voice causing him to say, “You can keep it.” George looked up at him, features easing out to overshadow his surprise. “If you’d like.”

George pursed his lips, looking to the side before sending Dream a small nod.

“You can practice on your own.” Dream continued before lifting a finger, which George’s eyes caught right before the blonde lightly poked the bow as he said, “A signature weapon is like your best friend. You should carry it around, get used to having it on you.”

“Are you saying this bow and I should bond?”

Was that a fucking joke? Dream furrowed his eyebrows, a smile growing on his lips when he noticed George pushing down one of his own. *It was—what an idiot.*

Wait, 'Idiot'?

Before he could utter another word, a chorus of laughter and chatter erupted from the entrance of the training field: *why the fuck were they fifteen minutes early?*

"I'll see you tomorrow." George coolly stated.

"Wh—okay. Tomorrow." Dream already began turning away from him, embarrassed due to his inability to not stutter around the brunet, until *he* called out for him. "Yeah?"

George lightly lifted the bow in the air, so reluctant Dream wasn't sure how candid his next comment was, "Thanks."

Dream broke into a curt laugh before giving him a solid nod. "My pleasure, Your Majesty."



George crossed paths with his three friends on his way into the palace as they filed out for training in Vulcan. They greeted him as if they hadn't seen him in years, when it had been ten hours, at best, since they saw each other last.

'They' excluded Quackity. And George wanted to pull him aside and make amends, but the contemplation had given Quackity enough time to disappear through the portal with Niki before he could even utter a word.

"He'll come around," Karl had said when he stayed back a moment. "How was practice with the prince, anyway?"

"S'alright, yeah." George had forced nonchalance in his tone; an uninvited ghost reenacting certain moments on the field to purposefully defy him.

"Yeah? Is that why you came back with presents?" Karl nudged the case of arrows and bow latched onto George's shoulder.

"These aren't presents. Homework, more like."

But that wasn't it at all. George was now in his room, eyes trailing over the wooden arrow that rested in his palm. *This was his to have.* And as much as George hated to admit, *this weapon suited him*; his grip, once he'd gotten it down, felt secure. The arrow he slotted in at his discretion came to him as if it were muscle memory.

And as he was taking off his rings to place in the circle of his crown, which had stayed behind, he turned his right hand over; the hand that still tingled with *his* touch.

This wasn't a 'spark' caused by the touch of a futile crush. This was an imperceptible cicatrice. One that could have willed a scar if the prince had left his hand over his for a second longer.

George traced the burn with the pad of his finger, wincing at how it stung in retaliation. He knew Fireborns ran hot, had the essence of fire coursing through them. But he had never imagined it to be as scalding as it had initially been on the training field.

And for a moment, George thought, *did every Fireborn possess this burning touch, or is it just you?*

Whatever it was, the searing sensation that had him lightly jerking at the touch, was the closest he

got to feeling *awake* in a *long* time.



Dream shrugged off his puffer jacket, recollections of yesterday's training with George surfaced his mind: how he had nearly suffocated under the heat due to the layers. *Or so he thought.*

Because normally, Dream thrived off the heat, adored the way the puffer jacket warmed him when it would probably render someone so uncomfortable they might pass out from overheating.

Until the brunet showed up, wearing his training attire—the same combination as yesterday's, yet striking Dream differently, this time around.

And then it clicked. *It's you*, Dream thought as heat enveloped him. *You're causing this.* And he wished he could say it *felt* like his puffer jacket wrapping him in comforting warmth, but this was... *not uncomfortable, just unfamiliar.*

Was he turned on? *Very possible.* His eyes followed the way the black fabric of George's nylon long-sleeve clung to his frame, accentuating his waist; curves that expanded the exact heat which coursed through him.

Dream immediately tore his eyes away because *what the fuck?*

He swallowed the bubbling obscene thoughts: how much of George's waist he could cover with his hands or how his loose curls would fill the space in between his fingers, curls that were much more apparent amiss his crown and—*dude. Pull yourself together.*

“Okay.” Dream breathed out, fixing his carnal gaze at the ground. “I’m gonna stand in front of the target, alright? Same thing, just aim for the target.” He made his way towards the target, projecting his voice to the brunet, “Recharge, shoot again.”

“Your Highness.” Dream stopped in his tracks, looking over his shoulder at him. “Your shield.” George nodded his head to the ditched shield, laid out on the grass.

Dream smirked, knowing very well what he was going to attempt with the brunet. “That is my shield, yes.”

Just as expected, George rolled his eyes. “Get it.”

Dream smirk progressed into an amused smile as he fully turned on the spot, facing him a few meters away. “No.”

George paused for a brief moment, blinking in his words before pure confusion etched itself on his face, deriving a breathless laugh from the blonde. “What’d you mean ‘no’?”

Dream stifled a laugh as he spoke through a strained throat. “Exactly what I mean—”

“I’m not taking the shot,” George concluded.

“*What, why?*” Dream ceased his need to laugh, making his way back to the brunet; he noticed the change in pace at which he approached him now in comparison to previous times.

George shot him a look that read: *‘are you stupid?’*, and Dream tried his best to contain his laughter before settling for standing a metre apart. “D’you want to get impaled?”

“No.” Dream shrugged, forcing insouciance into his tone.

George crossed his arms over his chest, flickering his gaze to the shield before looking back at Dream. “Then get your shield.”

Dream opened his mouth to say, ‘No’, but when George sucked in a sharp breath, tilting his head to the side, the look thieved the words from the blonde’s lips. “If you say ‘no’ *one* more time.”

Dream smiled fondly at that, half-moved; this was only the second full practice they shared, but this was the most emotion George had ever put on display. He was still unreadable at times, but then he’d spontaneously adopt these comments and counter-attacks that would have Dream not the slightest bit threatened, but disgustingly endeared.

“Geor—” Dream bit back his words in an instant and was thankful the king didn’t bat an eyelid at the near slip-up: *you almost called him by his first name, you moron*. “Your Majesty, we’ve been practicing your aim for an *hour*. I am more than one hundred percent sure you won’t accidentally impale me—”

“You don’t know that—”

“I do know that.” Dream cut him off, not feeling a shred of regret for doing so. “What, you’re gonna flawlessly hit the bullseye for every shot you’ve taken in a whole hour and suddenly miss *one*?”

“It’s different when you’re standing there with no protection.” George countered while somehow admitting defeat.

Dream rolled back his counter-arguments. *George was scared*, he knew that, *but that was the point*. From the very first time he saw George hold a weapon in his hand, Dream knew the one thing that held him back from his full potential was fearing the damage he could do to another human.

“I trust that you won’t hurt me.” Dream hated the way his voice had softened as he caught the brunet’s hardened gaze. “Don’t you?”

George rolled his eyes to the side and Dream was reminded of their conversation in the dingy village pub: *you do answer the questions asked, just not directly*.

“Just one shot.” Dream urged softly, regaining his attention; this time, expression undefined. “One sh—”

“Fine.” George breathed out.

Dream smiled, keeping his eyes on him for a brief moment before re-making his way towards the target.

The abundance of nerves snaking the brunet could be felt from where Dream stood and he momentarily felt bad until he realized he was really doing this for *him*. So, when George took a while to draw up his bow, Dream didn’t rush him.

Dream raised his voice so he could hear him as he coaxed, “You’re fine.”

And just as loud and clear, Dream received a sharp, “Shut up.”

Dream contained a laugh. “Relax your shoulders.” He calmly ordered, just as he had yesterday; and likewise, George followed through with every command. “Set?” Earning a nod from him, the blonde continued, “Draw back.” They weren’t hard steps to retain, but at that moment, Dream

could sense that every piece of information the brunet had absorbed left his mind entirely. “Shoot.” He finalized, but *nothing*.

He waited. A silence passed them.

“*Shoot.*”

Dream’s breath whisked past his lips as did George’s arrow that had brushed the side of his hair before it wedged itself in the target.

Another silence passed until George pulled his bow down, revealing his agape lips and slightly widened eyes.

Dream broke into a grin, after having recovered from how *fucking* close that arrow had been to him. “See?” He lightly extended his arms, receiving George’s eyes. “Untouched.”

George paused on him until a scowl replaced his initial shock. “Can you get your fucking shield now—”

Dream bowed his head with a curt nod. “I will get my shield—”

“—Thank you.” George huffed, shoulders coming down with his stress as he turned around to recollect himself.

As Dream went to retrieve his shield to lessen the chances of giving the brunet a stroke, he smiled to himself: *this was progress*.

And he was fully aware he wasn’t only referring to the training session.



There was something that came with the desire to remain asleep while being awake for others. And George could only do it if he was drunk, or high.

And with Karl’s services no longer at his disposal, George was left with *this*.

The bottle of cognac stared back at him, awakening his best friend, the one that knew Baudelaire on a personal level; and it screamed at him, forcing his hand into grabbing the liquor by its neck and draining its content.

And in the second he had discovered the dusty bottle, tucked at the back of his bookshelf, George had forgotten what time of day it was. Furthermore, forgetting his surroundings when he was drunkenly shovelling food into his mouth; the warriors sitting at the table sent over concerned glances.

But through his drunk eyes, they were unbothered. Or he was. He couldn’t remember.

What he *did* remember was going through the Vulcan portal because that’s about exactly when he started sobering up.

And the thing about relapse is you don’t really think about it when you’re on the verge of breaking your clean streak. George thought as he progressed through the field after spotting the prince. *That comes afterwards when you’re sober enough to deal with the consequences of your despondency.*

And with the prince smiling at him; the morning sunlight matching his mood as he greeted him, “Hey.” George already felt blindly annoyed with his exuberant attention.

“Hi.” George rasped.

He drank - was the immediate thought that came to Dream’s mind when seeing the dark circles under his eyes. *And it was barely noon.*

The moment Dream heard himself ask, “You alright?” He knew not a slight bit of genuine care came from it.

Because a big part of him thought, *you don’t care about this enough.* And it wasn’t until later that he understood how ignorant he had been. But in the heat of the moment, his infamous temper and impulsive thoughts overtaking his tongue had him indifferent about the brunet’s current state.

George’s words were twisted in remnants of alcohol as he lazily spoke, “M’fine.”

Before he could halt his tongue which bathed in a pool of malice, Dream found himself audibly saying, “You don’t look it.”

George’s eyes flew up to his and Dream was certain that was the first time he’d made an effort to properly open his eyes. “What’d you say?”

“Nothing—we’re doing target practice again. And I won’t be using my shield.” Dream turned around before George could reiterate yesterday’s issue with lack of protection. “You had succeeded in hitting the target instead of me, but that was also the first time you completely missed the bullseye.”

“‘Cause you were standing there with no shield.”

Dream slightly whirled around. “And that makes you lose control of your aim entirely?”

George’s features were scrunched with distaste. “Not entirely—I still hit the target.”

“Not the bullseye, though. And you *can* hit it. You’re just not focused enough.”

George rolled his eyes as he mumbled, “I would’ve been had you used your shield.”

“No.” Dream deadpanned, placing an undecipherable annoyance in the brunet’s expression. “No, Your Majesty, you wouldn’t have.”

“I—”

“Your aim is *flawless.*” Dream began, taking a step towards him, dismissing the way the brunet stood up straight; seemingly losing traces of intoxication the longer they held eye contact. “But the moment I stand in front of the target, you freeze. It has nothing to do with the shield. You would freeze regardless.”

George flickered his eyes to the ground. “S’not true.”

“It is.” Dream pressed, taking another step towards him. “You can’t be afraid of hurting people when you’re going on a battlefield.”

“I’m not afraid—”

“You are.” The sigh escaping past Dream’s lips pushed down the need to comfort him.

He came here drunk. You're the one taking this seriously and he isn't. That's not on you.

“So, get in position.” Dream ordered, turning away from him to make his way to the target; knowing that a second spent scrutinizing his expression would make him offer George the easy way out. “We’re not stopping until you hit the bullseye.”

When Dream turned around, back to the target and now facing George meters away, he couldn’t help the wave of contrition that washed over him as he stared back at the brunet; hesitantly drawing up his bow before filing in his arrow.

And unlike yesterday, Dream didn’t guide him through the process; didn’t vocalize the mantra they worked through. And George knew that. Through a lowered glare and aversion coursing through his frown, George stared back at Dream. And Dream felt unrecoverably penitent.

“Shoot.” Dream ordered, readying himself as he crossed his hands behind his back, puffing out his chest slightly; gaze fixed on George who seemed to be losing himself in his tantalizing subconscious. “*Shoot, Your Majesty.*”

George’s elbow moved back with his bowstring before he relaxed his grip, allowing the loaded arrow to course through the air before it thwacked itself in the target behind Dream.

George lowered his bow to reveal his stone-cold expression, one which did not fool Dream in the slightest as he could feel the nerves rinsing off of him even from the distance between them.

So as to not worsen his guilt, Dream veered his eyes from him before turning on his heel, merely glancing at the target before turning back around; gaze set on the ground as he said, “Try again.”

“What?”

“It didn’t hit the bullseye.”

“I don’t care—”

Dream’s unintentional glare shot up to the brunet, his words suddenly dying down with his breath. “Try again.”

Dream hated himself for the sheer thought of how he could have acted as his father would; reprimanding someone they cared about for dealing with the darkness in their mind with the light alcohol offered.

And with George standing still for a moment, eyes wavering over Dream before he glanced down at his bow, Dream forced control into his composure. “Load your bow, Your Majesty.”

Though quiet, almost mumbled, Dream heard the brunet say, “Heard you the first time.” Before he reached back, pulling an arrow from his case and slotting it through the bowstring.

Thus began a myriad of ‘Try again’ and always a new form of vocalized resistance from George, who seemed gradually defeated the more Dream urged him to continue. And were it not for the distance between them, Dream would have been able to visibly notice the paling that had occurred in the brunet’s fair skin on their very first practice.

Because if he had noticed, Dream wouldn’t have pushed so hard.

It took George stumbling back in his step, following Dream’s increase of the pace at which the brunet was to reload his arrows into his bow, for Dream to squint slightly and perceive the dilatory

exhaustion of alcohol depletion and sleep deprivation.

“Your Majesty—”

“I know. I’m going to reload—” He coughed, covering his mouth with his forearm as the arm holding up the bow indolently fell to his side. “Just give me a minute.” He slightly turned the other way.

Dream shook his head, wasting no time in walking over. “No, you—”

“I’m fine. Just hang on—”

“You’re not—hey.” Dream reached him, hand almost stretching out to his shoulder until George whisked around, eyes slightly wide when taking a few steps away from him; the blonde lightly threw his hands up before dropping them at his side. “You’re dehydrated.”

George avoided his gaze and drew up his bow again, with so much force it physically pained Dream to watch. “M’fine. Go back.”

“Oh, you’re fine?” Dream scoffed, tilting his head to the side, unable to stop the sorry smile that stitched his lips. “Last time you said that you emptied your breakfast on my training field.”

George finally looked up at him and the eyes he was met with had Dream wanting to rewrite the entire training session; less so composed with the force and pettiness that fuelled his harsh orders and more so with soul—more attention and care for the boy who looked absolutely dishevelled, remains of alcohol swirling in his red-rimmed eyes and dry lips.

George’s eyelids fluttered on Dream’s countenance before he weakly uttered, “I’m good.”

Dream stepped forward carefully, wrapping his hand around the arch of the bow, “Let’s just...” bringing it down for him, the brunet didn’t resist. “...stop for a bit, okay?” He quirked an eyebrow at him, though George had his eyes set on the ground: this time, not from shame, but fatigue. “We’ll get some water and try again.”

And though Dream didn’t need assurance for how mentally and physically depleted George was, the rate at which the brunet submitted cemented the image of someone who had reached their limit.



“You can s...” Dream’s eyes followed George who already settled himself on the stool at the kitchen island. “...sit there—water’s good?” He progressed towards the sink embedded into the counter, smiling at how George needed no granted permission to sit wherever he’d like.

Dream hated how empty his kitchen always was; he’d never lingered about in the kitchen of other realms, but he could imagine it was always lively. Like how it had once been when *she* was still here.

But with George finally regaining the colour in his cheeks, Dream was sort of thankful no one was there to cause noise where it was least needed.

“Do you, um,” George’s voice was hoarse, Dream hated himself for it; though it wasn’t entirely his fault that the brunet was this tired, a piece of him knew he should’ve probably not overworked him. “Never mind.” He shook his head, eyes deflecting to the marble counter.

Dream was about to pass the empty glass under the running water until he flipped the tap down again, seizing the water. *Your intoxicated tongue probably can't fathom water, the taste so foreign that it has you struggling to ask for anything else.*

"We also have...um, orange juice?" Dream's voice emulated the common tongue used when pretty brown eyes laid hesitantly on his. "If you'd prefer something with actual taste."

George blankly looked to the side, pausing before he softly asked, "Do you have apple juice?"

And Dream's heart was inundated with fondness, something he wanted to reproach himself for because it was over this idiot asking for *apple juice*. "Yes." He couldn't help the breathless chuckle that followed. "I have apple juice."

Silence encased them, only the sound of trickling juice into a clear glass filled their range; Dream would keep a stealthy gaze on the brunet, who fiddled with his rings, arms crossed over the counter; the entire weight of his upper body leaning into the slab for support.

A nearly inaudible 'thanks' was derived from George when Dream passed him the drink. Dream situated himself on the other side of the counter, vis-a-vis George as he began losing sight of himself, watching the brunet *drain* the apple juice from the glass.

George caught his stare, slowly pulling the rim from his lips as he swallowed harshly. "Why are you watching me like I'm gonna pass away any minute?" He tore his eyes from the blonde, placing his empty glass between his curved hands.

"Well," Dream admitted through a light smile. "That's what it looked like on the training field." Receiving no answer, only a mere quirk of his eyebrows before he directed his umber irises to the counter, Dream continued, "I pushed you too hard. I'm sorry."

George shook his head, twisting the ring around his forefinger with his thumb. "Don't be sorry. Someone's got to."

It was said with no trace of ardour, just plain emptiness behind his tone, but Dream knew he wasn't genuinely angry with him.

In fact, other than the times he'd been mildly irritated and annoyed at the things he'd say, George hadn't really been pissed off. At least, not to Dream's knowledge, or of Dream's doing.

Another silence passed them, Dream found himself in the same situation he'd been at the pub except, this time, there were so many things he wanted to say to him. So many things were simmering in his mind and filling him with violent guilt.

But the one thing Dream couldn't push down the further he allowed his eyes to linger on him was his father's battle plan for Salacia.

"Your Majesty, I..." Dream began and immediately lost the shred of confidence he'd mustered to confess when George lightly looked up at him. "...I must confess something." Complete and utter silence was what he received from the brunet, so he forced himself to continue, taking a deep breath. "My...father, um." He cleared his throat, looking down at his palms which pressed themselves into the slab of marble for physical support, and mental, so it seemed as he struggled to get the words out.

Voice scratchy, yet in the most comforting sense, George urged, "Go on."

Keeping his eyes fixed on the island, Dream let out a small breath. "He consults me about battle

plans in advance. And...he presented me with Salacia's..." He trailed off, heart thumping in his chest; the sensation reminded him of his confession to Sapnap and how he could only proceed through a word vomit, "My father has put you on the frontline. And I told him it was a terrible idea because you aren't prepared to be faced with that. And then in the armoury, you informed me that you didn't want to fight so directly and that's why I took so long to reassure you. He told me it was confidential information and that's why I wasn't sure if I should've told you. And I also didn't know how—"

"Your Highness," George called, holding Dream's utterance hostage. "Chill."

Chill. A punched-out breath accompanied by a bitter and curt chuckle escaped Dream as he looked at him entirely perplexed, and only mildly relieved at his interruption.

"You're acting as if you've committed a crime." George rolled his eyes before they returned to his hands, fingers still fidgeting with rings.

"Haven't I?" Dream huffed before lifting a sweaty palm from the kitchen island, carding his fingers through his hair. "You...you should...I need you to speak with him." George transposed his gaze slightly higher than where his hands had stilled. "He won't listen to me about changing your position, but you could convince him."

Having to suffer through conversations with his father, Dream was more than acquainted with tense silences, but there was something about the pauses which George took; though still in fear of what he was to say next, Dream didn't feel threatened or on guard, just simply in desire of his thoughts.

"Who else is on the frontline with me?" George then asked, bringing his attention back to his rings.

Dream's brows knitted, his palm returning to the counter as he leaned forward. "Salacia's best warriors, I'd say—um...Alex, Sam, and Jack. And two others whose names I can't remember."

The announced warriors urged an understanding nod from the brunet who jutted his bottom lip out as if he was content with Dream's reply. "And...why would I want my position changed?"

Dream blinked at him as if the question posed was so rhetorical he wondered why it was even being asked. "You...you said you didn't want to fight directly. That's what being in the frontline would require of you, Your Majesty."

"Mhm." George looked up at him, ridding the blonde of his confusion with a simple, vacant stare. "But you just said they were Salacia's best warriors—one of which I can vouch for."

Alex, who Dream briefly remembered encountering in collective training years ago, was obviously one of George's better friends; being part of his posse and guarding him wherever he went.

"Yes, but...regardless of whether or not they are good, it's not...it's not wise for you to be on the frontline for your *first-ever* battle." Dream felt pins and needles growing which each pumped-out word, trying his best not to offend him, although he was sure it wouldn't affect George much if he were to skid off into a harsher tone.

"I believe that they can get me to the bastard who killed my mother. And that's all I really need." George easily said, not a trace of emotion wrapping his tone as he held Dream's gaze.

"Though I don't doubt that, you wouldn't make it to him without having caught fatal injuries in the process. And I fear that going up against him after pushing through as a frontline defender will simply *kill* you, Your Majesty." Dream was rushing his words, but the brunet's look of blatant

disregard for his own well-being had him beyond alarmed.

George's brows furrowed when he tilted his chin up slightly. "Have I ever given you a reason to believe that I want to come out of this battle alive?"

And hearing exactly what he feared he would in regards to George's will to live, or lack thereof, Dream was momentarily mute.

"I don't care what happens to me in that battle," George stated, looking down at his hands. "I just want to honour her—to avenge her."

Almost as if he had lost sense of his surroundings, Dream found himself saying, "Wouldn't honouring her mean you *should* come out of the battle alive?" He weakly looked up from the counter to meet George's glare. "Wouldn't she *want* you alive?"

George fixed him and Dream found himself suffocating under his look. "I wanted *her* alive."

Dream's eyelids fluttered on his countenance as distress trapped him. "She didn't choose her destiny, Your Majesty. She didn't—"

"She chose death every time she went into battle, Your Highness."

And though there were so many more things Dream could have said to defend Queen Anthea, he felt as if he had already overstepped; what with the way George was beyond exhausted from everything that had occurred leading him up to this point.

The soles of the stool George was sitting on scraped against the marble flooring as he stood up. "We should head back."

Dream's remorse laid within a place where he hadn't considered why he was so involved in helping George in the first place—until it circled his mind like vultures: *you won't even be killing the person who was responsible for her death, you would just be aiding my father's desires to overtake The Nether.*

Regaining reason and his fight to keep George alive when the brunet wanted to die in unknowingly going against the wrongfully convicted, Dream took in a deep breath as his incentive rushed control through him.

Dream called out for him, causing the brunet to stop in his tracks as he barely turned around to look at him. "Training is over for today—"

"Wha—"

"Get some rest. You'll need it for tomorrow."

George squinted at him. "Excuse me?"

Dream grabbed the empty glass sitting on the island, feeling the lack of warmth from where the brunet had nursed it, "We're going to start on elemental training," He turned around and disposed it into the sink; never turning around to face him as he said, "And I will meet you at your palace since it would make more sense to teach that in your biome."

"But we've still got—"

"I will see you tomorrow." Dream whisked around, trying his best not to lose his composure as he

held onto the counter behind him for support; gripping the edge tightly. “Your Majesty.”

George lingered in the doorway for a moment, as if he had been spun on his footing in a whirlwind of dumped information. And then he looked up from the ground over to Dream before giving him a curt nod and allowing his footsteps to echo out, leaving Dream to regain his breathing that felt contrite with every growing second of the brunet’s presence.



Collective dinner wasn’t mandatory hence George’s grumbling stomach in the early AM’s since he had chosen not to attend.

The reason behind his absence wasn’t lack of satiation, it was more so that he didn’t want to be in the same vicinity as Quackity due to their concurring silent treatment. And though he was blind drunk at collective breakfast this morning, he was certain Quackity hadn’t attended. *But he still couldn’t risk bumping into him at dinner.*

Yet as the clock struck two on their third day of petty avoidance, George realized he missed Quackity so fucking much that he just wanted to pull him into his arms and make amends.

And honestly, laying in bed reworking his conversation and overall training session with the prince was not helping how detrimentally exhausted he mentally and physically felt.

When George quietly stepped out of his room to go down to the kitchen in hopes of grabbing leftovers, he heard the creak of Quackity’s door a few meters down the hall. His head snapped in its direction and orange light spilled out into the hallway until the raven-haired boy poked his head out.

They met eyes; Quackity’s went wide before he attempted to close the door, but George made a beeline for it, slamming his forearm against the wooden surface to stop its shutting process.

Quackity tried to fight it, pushing it close, but George held his ground with likely effort until the shorter gave up with a huff, turning around in his spot as he progressed back into his room.

George lightly scowled at him, massaging his forearm that began to sting. “You know,” He glared at him as he stepped inside. “For someone who wants me alive so badly, you sure as fuck are acting as if I’m dead to you.”

Quackity scoffed, shaking his head as he kept his back to George.

George sighed, gaze softening on his best friend when he realized the reason behind fighting his way in here. “Sorry.” He mumbled, earning a small shift in the turn of Quackity’s head. “Too soon?”

A small silence passed them by, crickets could be heard through the small crack of Quackity’s window.

“Not soon enough,” Quackity muttered before turning around—*wearing a worked smile.*

The corner of George’s lips swung upwards, augmenting the rate at which Quackity smiled back.

Quackity wasn’t big on hugs, but George knew it came easy when it was just the two of them in a quiet room. So, he allowed his feet to stride across the room before pulling his best friend into a bone-crushing embrace. And as he felt Quackity’s arms slowly wrap themselves around his torso, George thought, *okay, maybe you missed me too.*

“Dumbass.” Quackity shoved him off, pushing down his grin as he crossed his arms over his chest. “Why the fuck are you up?”

George chuckled, furrowing his eyebrows. “Why are *you* up?”

Quackity bit his lip, glancing down at the ground before looking up at him. “I was avoiding you, so I skipped dinner. Now I’m fucking starving.”

George chortled, rolling his eyes slightly. “Likewise.”

Quackity huffed out a laugh. “That’s so messed up.”

“Are we done, then?” George lifted an eyebrow. “Avoiding each other?”

“*George...*” Quackity faked his pout. “Did you miss me?”

Yes, you fucking idiot. An indifferent laugh sputtered past George’s lips as he knocked his shoulder with Quackity’s before plopping down at the edge of his bed.

“So,” Quackity smiled tauntingly, already scratching the surface of George’s provocation. “How’s practice with *Prince Vulcan* been?” He leaned his back onto his dresser, eyeing the brunet.

George let out a deep breath, falling back onto the raven-haired boy’s bed. “Alright.”

“And...why are you training with him in private again?” The gibe in his tone had George propping himself up on his elbows.

And sure enough, a knowing look swirled in dark brown eyes.

“He’s good at what he does, Quackity,” George spoke slowly, wearing a jaunty glare.

“Sorry, I need to ask, you know? ‘Cause you, who called him a ‘*cocky prick*’, ” Quackity’s imitation of George’s accent derived a scoff from the brunet. “Would *not* have endured a second alone with him.”

George winced at the memory before offering a light laugh. “...Yeah, uh.” He gave him a small shrug. “I don’t know. I guess...he’s not as bad as I thought him to be.” Met with the surprise on Quackity’s face, George quickly added, “I’m mostly just using him for how genuinely good he is at training people.”

Quackity lightly threw his hands up, ducking his head as he kept a half-joking judging gaze on his friend. “Just saying...Karl, Niki, and I could have helped you train if you didn’t want to do it in front of a crowd.”

George groaned as he gradually sat up. “No, Q, it’s not just that.” He chewed on his bottom lip, eyes casting off to the side. “When I say he’s good at training, I don’t just mean that he’s a good fighter. He, like, *knows* people. Like...understands them?”

Quackity’s brows curved, his smile fading off slightly. “I... *what*?”

George’s eyelids fluttered shut before they revealed the utter confusion on his best friend’s face. “Like...when he proposed the idea of one-on-one training? He told me about his guard—”

“Stinknap?”

“Yes.” George chuckled lightly. “Apparently he was absolute dog shit when admitted to Vulcan,

like, he didn't know how to use his elemental powers. He had a mental blockade of sorts where he couldn't quite reach the fire within him? And the prince was able to unlock that, hence why the idiot is so good at fighting now, you know? And...how he found his weapon of choice, or whatever—I don't know if..."

"Yeah, yeah. Like Niki has her daggers—"

"Yeah." George nodded before his eyes drifted to the floor. "At first, I thought he was full of shit, but...he *actually* knows how to figure that shit out about people, you know?"

"Wait, so...you found yours?"

"*He* found mine, yes." George broke into a soft smile before quickly veiling it with disdain. "Bow and arrow."

Quackity clicked his tongue as he walked over, taking a seat beside him. "That explains why you came back with that shit yesterday." George fully sat up in his seat to align his body with Quackity's. "So, but...why did he propose one-on-one training on the basis of Stinknap not being able to reach his elemental powers?"

George paused on his question because this was going to be the first time any of his friends would find out the truth. Quackity and the others had thought George's avoidance of collective training was due to a watchful crowd, but George couldn't give less of a fuck about how he looked to hundreds of warriors.

For the longest time, he was ashamed of not being able to use his elemental powers when Niki, Quackity, and Karl would playfully use theirs for jokes whenever they'd hang out. And he feared that there would be a moment where it would be asked of him, on the Vulcan training field, to use his powers. And how he would freeze, with his three friends intently watching him.

"George..." Quackity softly called and George forcefully looked at him—a look lowered with shame. "...why the fuck didn't you tell me?"

George shook his head, leaning forward so his elbows rested on his knees, "It's fucking embarrassing, man."

"What the f—did Anthea know? Does Cole?" Earning a small nod from George, Quackity let out a tired sigh. "*That's* why you didn't ask me to train you."

"You have enough on your plate, Quackity," George mumbled, looking over his shoulder and up at him. "And this is what Prince Vulcan *does*, you know? So...why not utilize my resources?" He cracked a weak smile, earning a similar response from the raven-haired boy.

And then the smile faded off his face in an instant as he asked, "Don't you need to trust him for that, though?"

George's brows knitted. "Not really? I mean...I haven't really had to tell him anything for him to figure out my signature weapon. He just...figured it out on his own."

"Good." Quackity clipped, briefly looking ahead. "Don't trust him too much, okay?"

George scoffed lightly. "I didn't. I won't, but..." He shrugged, glancing down at the ground. "...why?"

"I'm sure they all mean well, but," Quackity leaned forward as well, his sigh audible from where

their shoulders brushed. “I’ve never...entirely trusted that realm.”

George’s stare drew up to Quackity’s side profile: he wanted to believe Quackity’s reasoning was due to him not having any personal connections with anyone from the Vulcan realm, but he felt as if there was something more.

And could George really blame him? Because though it wasn’t a big issue and hadn’t entirely affected him, the prince was still sitting on that confession for god knows how long until he owned up.

And George was most positive that King Sebastian had been holding his son back, knowing very well he wouldn’t disobey him, nor go against his wishes of confidentiality.

“Just promise me, yeah?”

George flicked his eyes up to meet his, giving him a slight nod.

And it’s not like George was going to become fast friends with the prince after recurring practices, he was just stating that he *had* miscalculated.

Because the prince understood people and yet it seemed as if no one understood him. And every now and then, that fact would pique interest within George, but no one had to know about that part just yet.

“I’m not doing this to gain connections, Quackity,” George spoke after a while and Quackity glanced at him. “All these training sessions, everything...everything that I’m doing is for her.”

Quackity nodded in concurrence before placing light taps on George’s shoulder as he said, “I’m proud of you, you know?” Causing the brunet to break into a wavering smile, nose scrunching at the statement. “I heard you, uh, stopped with the...drugs and shit.”

As if the words took the form of a bullet to his chest, George nearly flinched but managed a faint blink, swallowing the remark as if it were lead. *He would stop but always wondered when something would push him to start again.* Because given everything that was crumbling around him, George’s dormant demon was skating the thinly iced lake over his temptations.

Quackity took his silence for reiteration, ducking his chin down slightly in search of copper irises. “Is that true?”

George looked up at him through his lashes, not being able to voice out what had happened that morning.

Quackity pursed his lips to the side before releasing a small breath; one that rippled like a comforting wave over George as he was so sure he was going to get rightfully chewed out for his relapse, especially from Quackity.

“When?” Quackity asked through a hushed whisper as if they were now encased in a safe space.

And it felt as such when George felt mentally liberated enough to utter out, “This morning.” His eyelids flapped shut, still hesitant of looking into accepting dark eyes. “I’m so sorry, Q, I—” His words were cut off when an arm laid heavy around his shoulders, pulling him into a tight hold; his head dropped onto the raven-haired boy’s shoulder as he scooted into his side.

Quackity’s chest fell with his sigh as he laid his head atop George’s, wrapping careful fingers around the brunet’s shoulder. “It’s okay.”

George shut his eyes once more, this time, keeping them shut in the newfound comfort. “I’m gonna fix it.”

Quackity squeezed his shoulder lightly. “You already are.” He turned his head, his forehead hidden in the fluff of George’s hair. “One step at a time.” He assured, his breath fanning over the top of the brunet’s earlobe. “*Man*, you’re a piece of work.”

“You literally signed up for this.” George forced lightness in his tone, earning a much louder laugh from Quackity, his shoulder jerking against their resting bodies.

“I know I did, dumbass.” Quackity took his hand off his shoulder, ruffling George’s hair before lightly bumping his shoulder against his. “And I’m still here, aren’t I?”

And though George had never doubted that once, the reminder always jacketed his soul with familiar warmth; making him feel like he was being welcomed back home from having lingered on the doorsteps for longer than he’d like.

Chapter End Notes

hiiii.

dnf progress is upon us and only going up from here.

thank you for the kudos & the nice, as always. hope you're all keeping well, see you lot soon x (:

Look Outside

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



The Vulcan palace has never felt like home to Dream. He'd get the reminder every time he'd return from the outside, looking up from the doorsteps and at the heavy mahogany doors. He swears all he can hear is "turn back".

But he doesn't. He never does. But he hopes that one day he can. Or at least give the palace a new meaning, so the proceeding steps are less so grudging and more so feather-light.

Dream knew the only way to make the palace feel like home again was to unroot the problem. The problem—though he would never openly admit—was his father. His father, who sat at the head of the table, head lolled back as a laugh escaped him.

Dream wanted to fucking strangle him.

He's so unbothered because everything is going according to plan, Dream's jaw tensed, grip binding the silver of his fork. *Because of me*. Because if he wasn't veiling his father's treachery, George would've quit the battle instantly.

And he was so at ease, all while Dream was crushing himself to clean up *his* mess by fighting to keep the king alive.

But Dream couldn't really victimize himself when all he *had* to do was tell George the truth. He *couldn't* do that, though. No matter how much of a threat Sebastian was, Dream couldn't tell George.

Because at the end of the day, George was just another person. And his father was blood—family.

And Dream remembered the last time he had *tried* to disobey Sebastian; how it had earned him a slap in the face—not literally, although he felt as if that might've hurt less.

Keeping quiet though his temper was roused to rupture, Dream's chair scraped against the floorboards beneath him when he stood up, clutching onto his plate of barely touched food.

"Leaving so soon?"

Dream followed the familiar voice with a glare. "Don't really have an appetite, sir."

Dream could feel the twenty-sum pairs of eyes on him at his left, but chose to ignore it; sporting a lingering glower on his father before he progressed towards the kitchen.

"Maybe that's why your punches are falling flat. You're losing muscle." Sebastian aimlessly derided.

That suspended Dream's movements; one hand flat on the revolving door leading to the kitchen and the other tightly grasping his plate—so tight he was surprised the ceramic hadn't shattered in his grip.

"And somehow the man still kicks our ass on the training field." One of the warriors, Dylan,

chimed in.

Dream's eyes glazed over the table as the chorus of agreements occurred until he spotted Dylan: the warrior sent Dream a subtle wink, meriting a tight-lipped smile from the blonde.

In moments like these, Dream was reminded of why he continued to fight for his realm. He adored being on the battlefield, feeling the power that billowed through him when he was in control of his sword. But what truly made it worth it was the men that fought by his side.

Because this wasn't the first time Dream had been defended against Sebastian's remarks; having had all witnessed and endured their king's rough training—maybe not to Dream's extent—they were in agreement that the man ruling their realm was a goddamn menace.

These men kept Dream afloat most of the time. And Sapnap was no exception. Sapnap, who for some reason, wasn't at collective dinner—a reason Dream found out later that night in the midst of his personal practice time.

According to Sapnap, he was too busy “railing” someone from the Terra realm.

When they settled on the grass of the training field, vis-a-vis each other, Sapnap had said, *“I ran out of condoms, by the way, so I stole one from your nightstand.”*

To which Dream responded, *“I told you not to go through my shit when I'm not there,”* in the way that perfectly expressed domesticity regarding the little pet peeves and annoying things fared by the other.

Their conversation transposed from light to heavy in the way it always would when the two of them were under the night sky. Banter turned into addressing Dream's training session with George the following day, to which the younger posed a classic ‘Sapnap question’: direct and straightforward, holding no filter or sugarcoated words.

“Is King George an alcoholic?”

“*What?*” Dream asked through a laugh, one that was riddled with nerves.

“Well,” Sapnap spread his legs out in front of him before leaning back to prop himself up on his elbows. “You told me he came to practice drunk this morning, right?”

“Yeah—I-I mean. He was more so coming down from it, but.” Dream shrugged lightly, not necessarily knowing the notion of his query.

“So...is he?”

The tremors. The way he refused a drink. Dream tightened his interlocked fingers. *The way his withdrawals showcased themselves on their very first practice.*

Dream swallowed. “Sometimes, when I look at him...” His voice was quiet, purposely resting in between his lips; almost as if he was speaking to himself. “...I see traces of her.”

Sapnap noticeably shifted in his peripheral. “That's a definite ‘yes’.” He muttered through a shaky breath. “Look, the reason I ask is ‘cause...well, okay. You said keeping this secret from King George will drive you insane. But you're obviously gonna keep inserting yourself wherever Sebastian causes a mess since you have no choice but to put up with his shit, what with wanting to reassure your inheritance of the crown.”

Dream chuckled lightly, squinting at him. “Where are you going with this?”

Sapnap adjusted himself, elbows digging further into the grass beneath him. “King George can’t fight for shit, right? On top of that, he’s an addict. He was thrown into kingship, like, probably so goddamn unprepared. But *you* are willing to help him—”

“Because of my father—”

“*But also* because you’re a good person. You fucking nimrod.” Sapnap rolled his eyes. “You can’t fathom the idea of this idiot—who’s pretty much still a stranger to you—to die in battle, so you give him *one-on-one training*. Do you know how unattainable that shit is for other warriors in this kingdom? Speaking from personal experience, your training is one of the kind, bro.” A humble smile caused Dream to look down at the ground, cheeks flushed. “Dream.” He called, earning his vacillating attention. “You’re *helping* him. The specifics don’t matter. You’re *helping* him. So, stop worrying. Stop...blaming yourself for the shit Sebastian does.”

“Sap—”

“You *have* to find a silver lining in this.” Sapnap let out a deep huff, following his discourse. “Otherwise, you’ll drill yourself into the fucking ground.” His voice died down slowly, almost as if his impending thoughts caught up to him too fast. “God knows it’s already happened once.”

Dream remembered the night his father’s mistakes came crashing down on the palace, on *his mother*, and how he had absolutely lost his temper. The very night Dream was reminded of why, no matter how much he despised Sebastian’s reasoning, he couldn’t do anything to help the situation if he wanted to inherit the crown.

“Don’t internalize that.” Sapnap chimed in, tearing him from his thoughts. “I understood then and I understand now. I’ve been by your side through all of it.”



Lightly tossing his fork and allowing its teeth to scrape against the ceramic of his plate, George huffed out, “Fuck this collective breakfast bullshit.”

Airily glazing over at the stares they received from the soldiers occupying the table, Quackity returned his eyes to George. “How does Prince Vulcan put up with your morning attitude?” He leaned back in his seat, smiling down at the brunet. “I feel for him.”

“Feel for *me*, idiot.” George furrowed his eyebrows, slight offence scratched in his expression. “He fucking drains me. I can barely keep up with him.”

“Good.” Quackity giggled through a hum, forking a sausage link. “*Someone’s* gotta toughen you up.”

“Right, ‘cause all that’s been happening around me for years hasn’t done that already.” George subtly rolled his eyes.

“See,” Quackity pointed his fork at him, enlarging the degree of George’s scowl. “Attitude.” He continued fearlessly. “And you know that’s not what I meant by toughening you up.”

George knew, but he’d be dead before he allowed someone to have the last word. “I never know what you mean, Quackity. Get better at phrasing things, maybe.”

Quackity adopted the brunet’s preset glare, using it against him. “You ruin my mornings, you

know that?”

“George?” Ana’s voice seeped in from behind him, breaking the bickering pair apart. “Prince Vulcan’s at the door. Something about your training session.”

George noticed Quackity in his peripheral, immediately shooting him a glare when the younger sported a smug smile.

George dismissed the taunting laugh that escaped Quackity as he progressed into the kitchen, down the large halls and to the foyer, taking a small breath before he allowed the cold breeze of Salacia’s court to course past the front doors and past *him*.

Stood tall and broad, sporting his training attire that accentuated the exact confidence that a built as such would impose—Prince of Vulcan.

George gave him a small nod. “Hey.”

“Hi.” *And there it was*, the soft tone that worked against the image of a man who could intimidate anyone with a simple look. “I hope I’m not too early. I can go back—”

George rolled his eyes, stepping aside. “Just come inside.”

Prince of Vulcan ducked his chin, biting on his bottom lip to stop a smile George feared he was getting accustomed to—a fear that lay within a warm response towards it.

“You’re not...too cold?” George asked, immediately cringing at the question that stumbled past his lips.

Having been momentarily lost in his surroundings, the prince turned on his heels to face him, but George had already turned the other way to shut the door. “Uh, no.” Recollecting himself, George finally looked up at him. “It’s...it was cold out. But once I get adjusted to the temperature, I can usually generate enough pyro to warm myself.”

George blinked at him because *what the fuck* did that even mean?

The prince seemed to have caught on, giving him a small smile. “I can see you’re confused—”

“Just a bit.” George playfully winced, lenient to the near upturn at the corner of his lips.

“It’s a good thing we’re learning about elemental powers today, then, huh?” He chuckled lightly.

George’s smile progressed. “Mhm.”

He hadn’t really thought about the way in which their last conversation ended until that very moment. And it was only brief as the tension that brewed in their last interaction seemed to have been scooped up by this one.

“I know Salacia has a stream? Further down your training field?” The prince asked after a silence neither of them seemed to have noticed as they concurrently looked away from the other.

“Yes, past the forest. Deeper down.” George lifted his hand, engaging to showcase his next statement. “Much, uh...” He stopped, dropping his hand at his side to immediately pocket it because *that* hand articulation was unnecessary *and* embarrassing. “...deeper.” He finished through a quiet breath.

“Cool—”

“Cool—I’ll bring us.” George immediately walked past him, wanting to escape the immense foyer that felt as though it had shrunk down in size the longer this conversation dread on.

It wasn’t that he hadn’t considered it, George thought as he walked alongside the prince, guiding him through the backcourt of the palace and towards the forest. There had been some changes since he first met the prince.

In the past, for George to generate any sort of liking to a stranger, he would fall in lust with single features.

With the prince, George felt like a single feature developed into two. And with every training session, it would accumulate. He wasn’t sure when he started accepting them, but he thought—now with the drugs and alcohol no longer blurring his vision—he was finally able to mentally address them.

“I’ve never been back here.” His voice circled George’s thoughts, thoughts about *him*.

And in circling his subconscious, the prince’s voice settled right next to the other considerable features: *his eyes under the Vulcan sun, his thighs which were ribbed by the fabric of his black cargo pants, and his hands—they were admirable on their own.*

George shook his head. *This was so unnecessary.* All of it was so dumb to even consider given the situation he was in. He knew this was just his current obsession. And maybe unnecessary is precisely what he craved. Everything else was so demanding, ever since this kingship had been sprung onto him.

George needed *fun*. Distractions.

The prince —“I can hear the water.”—*was starting to slowly become the perfect distraction.*

“Yeah.” George croaked out before glancing up at him. “We’re pretty much here.” He took a hand from his pocket to motion to the trees that lead to a small excavated path, leading into the deep of the forest. “After you.”

“Thank you.” The prince nodded, hesitantly stepping forward until he started picking up his steady pace.

They continued to walk in silence; rustling leaves and cracked twigs sounding in their space, the streaming water nearing their range.

“Woah.” The prince slowed down in his steps. “This is...much bigger than I thought.”

George leaned his side into a tree trunk, sleep somehow still holding him captive. “Big enough to work with for today?”

The prince turned in his spot to look at him, George found himself straightening his posture the moment he caught his eyes. “Y-yeah. More than enough—it’s big enough.”

George looked at him through his lashes, pushing down a smile. “You alright?”

“Yeah—”

“You look...” George withdrew a hand from his pocket, circling his own cheekbones before lightly pointing at the blonde. “...flushed.”

The prince cleared his throat, glancing at the ground, allowing George a moment to let a smug smile slip before he looked over at him again. "I'm fine. Just...adjusting to the new cold with the water being so close to us, you know."

"Mm." George hummed, not proceeding with a comment that would only further the flustered look on the prince's face. "Makes sense."

There was a brief moment in which they caught eyes again; this time, however, with a concurrent twitch at the corner of their lips, they simultaneously looked away from each other.

"So," The prince crossed his hands behind his back. "As I'm sure you're aware, there are two spectrums to our Kingdom."

Upon not hearing an answer from the brunet, the prince looked at him expectantly till all faith was lost.

"Are you...are you serious—"

"I read novels, not handbooks."

"*'Handbooks'*," The prince slicked his lips before pressing them together, stifling a grin. "This is common knowledge, Your Majesty. You've lived here your entire life."

"Surely you've not come here to shit on my lack of knowledge—"

Panic instantly flashed through his expression. "F—no. No. I wasn't—"

"Only joking." George furrowed his eyebrows, a puny smirk playing at his lips before he pushed himself off the tree trunk. "Two spectrums. What are they, then?"

George knew the fucking spectrums. But a little feigned ignorance couldn't hurt, especially not when it derived panic and flushed expressions from the comely prince.

"Epistemica." His modest tone seemed to grow quieter with every step George took towards him. "...And Emotiv."

The Romanian language, through only two spoken words, had never sounded more alluring befalling his tongue. George greeted the ground with a smug smile, stopping in his tracks—a few steps away from him.

"Epistemic and emotional." George transmuted before looking up at him, once again met with dawn-tinted cheeks and blown out pupils. "And where do we fit?"

His Adam's apple bobbed with a noiseless swallow. "Something tells me you already know."

George cocked his head to the side slightly. "How's that?"

The prince drove in a meagre breath, straightening his shoulders as he took a step forward. George almost stepped back as though the reinstated height difference shaved off a small fraction of his confidence.

"You said 'we'," The corner of the blonde's lips tugged up. "Implying that you already know we are in the same spectrum."

An entertained smile grew on their faces, George quickly hid his by looking down at the ground. "Smart."

What he meant to say was ‘*smartass*’, but he held himself back despite the gibe burning the tip of his tongue.

As if the prince caught onto the muted playful insult, he easily said, “So are you, it seems.” And that statement shouldn’t have so easily received George’s eyes were it not for how soft-spoken he’d been since they reached the water. “Vulcan and Salacia,” The switch mentally startled George. “Emotiv. Eurus and Terra—”

“—Epistemic,” George concluded.

The prince gave him a terse nod. “Good.” He lingered on him for a moment before turning around, “What are you feeling, Your Majesty?”

George felt as if his preestablished dynamic for this interaction had completely switched, causing the prince’s question to echo through his mind in a language that didn’t sound native. “What?”

“What emotion are you feeling?” The prince reiterated.

“I...*what*—why does that matter?” George shook his head, features scrunched before he looked up at him.

The prince chuckled inwardly. “Being from the emotional spectrum, your powers rely heavily on your emotions. When you feel something so strongly, it’s easier for you to generate your powers... it’s more...effective, as well.”

George quirked an eyebrow before relaxing in the conversance. “Okay—I...I mean I’m not sure...” He trailed off, glimpsing to the side. “...I don’t know how—I’m not sure I feel anything.” He stated before hesitantly looking over at him. “At the moment.”

The prince peered at him for a moment. “You don’t...feel anything right now? Like...nothing at all?”

“No?”

Earlier he felt like he could potentially smash a plate over Quackity’s head for being the annoying little shit he is, but that lasted five seconds before he was already back to feeling...*yeah, nothing*.

The prince clicked his tongue before nodding as if he was formulating an alternative in his head.

“Does that...fuck everything up, or—”

“No, no.” The prince ushered, somehow not a trace of panic in his tone as he offered a light smile. “Not at all, Your Majesty.”

George wasn’t sure when he came to this conclusion, but he was growing tired of the prince referring to him so formally. He hated formalities, but only when it came to his close friends using them to call upon him.

“We’ll just have to work backwards.” The blonde walked over to the brook’s bank, crouching down before passing his fingers in the running water.

George carefully approached him, stirring his gaze ever so slightly to catch his hands before the prince looked over his shoulder and up at him.

“Can you get your hands wet for me?”

“Excuse me?”

The prince hung his head with a small laugh before standing up, passing his dampened fingers through his hair. “You want to feel in touch with your element,” He began, dropping his hand at his side. “Getting your hands wet will help with that.”

George would have abided, no questions asked, but again, the lack of substance contorting his mind gave him the drive to be the natural pest he was.

So he tilted his chin, crossing his arms over his chest as he answered, “So, you’re telling me Sapnap had to put his hand in fucking fire?” Earning a breathless chuckle from the blonde, George continued, “*To feel in touch with his element?*”

“You’re s—no, we found another way for him. Do you trust me?”

And he was so fucking easygoing that George wanted to openly say ‘yes’, but he remembered Quackity’s advice and hesitated for a moment.

To be fair, it didn’t hurt to lie to the prince. “Sure?” George nonchalantly offered.

But when the prince smiled back in contentment, George wasn’t sure who he was or had been, lying to.

“Cool, so...” He stepped aside, motioning to the stream with his hand.

George shot him a look before grudgingly crouching down, passing his fingers through the water.

And he didn’t feel shit nor was he expecting to.

“Close your eyes.” The prince suggested, earning the exact opposite when George looked up at him with perplexed disgust. “I swear it’ll help.”

“It better ‘cause I’ll be honest this is starting to look pretty stupid,” George mumbled under his breath before allowing the water to be the last thing he’d see for a brief moment. “They’re shut.”

Idiot, he wanted to add. Because what the hell was this process?

George swore a minute passed before the prince spoke up. “Feel anything?”

“Yeah,” George replied through a whisper.

“Great. Wha—”

“—Sleepy.” George opened his eyes to repose them onto the prince. “I feel sleepy, Your Highness.”

“Alright.” The prince let out a quiet sigh before giving an understanding nod, George shook his hands to rid of the astray droplets at the tip of his fingers on his way back up. “Next step.”



Dream’s little white lies were slowly catching up to him.

When he told George that it took a few weeks for Sapnap to liberate himself of his mental blockade, Dream might have been overexaggerating. Sapnap had always been in touch with his emotions and it’s not like he needed a grand deal of it if he was just a guard: a non-royal whose

powers capped at pyrokinetic combat.

It had really taken Sapnap a week, in sparsed days, for him to unlock his powers.

George, however, was going to be different. He was not only a royal but also at the top of the hierarchy. He had inherited all of his mother's powers; the myriad of techniques and applications that came with Water Manipulation.

And George was *not* in tune with his emotions.

George, as far as Dream was aware, was impossible to piss off.

Because of that, the first elemental practice was ineffective. But it wasn't going to be impossible. Dream just knew he had to get to the root of what roused George; the things that would make him *react*, lose control over the threshold of his emotions.

But in losing control, George would have to learn how to regain it. And with the lack of training and practice that he *should* have had throughout his growing years, Dream feared *that* would be the main issue of his learning experience.



It wasn't impossible to train George, but it was *fucking tough*.

Dream, being his trainer, wouldn't want his impatience to show itself. He had to keep himself together *for* him, but as the hours drew on with no progress, George was getting frustrated. And so was he.

They had worked through every emotion, or at least tried to. Dream tried to lock in on sadness, maybe enough to generate even a cloud, but to no avail.

Elemental powers didn't always have to derive from darker emotions, any sort of overstimulation could have George moving the pace of the streaming water, the clouds, the precipitation—if any.

But to no fucking avail. George was unmoved. With every tactic Dream had lightly implied on Sapnap, turning it up slightly for George, Dream was unable to get him to feel anything.

Which was maybe why a part of him hadn't considered getting him angry. Dream thought, if something as light as deriving a laugh or a tear from the king hadn't worked, how could something as powerful and unhinged as fury work.

"Fuck." George huffed under his breath, lightly kicking at a rock that strayed on the mossy ground.

Dream was perched over on a rock, palms digging into the mineral for support as he looked at George from the wisps of his fringe. "S'okay. Let's try again—"

"Don't." George's tone stated a warning; with his back to Dream and his fingers digging into his hips as he steadied his breathing, the brunet—if Dream deduced correctly—was reaching his limit.

And not in the way that his skin was paling, or he looked like he was on the verge of puking, but because he was getting *there*. To the peak of the emotion which Dream thought he'd never procure.

From Sapnap, anger came easy. A few pushes and shoves had him immediately retaliating, but it took approximately three hours for George to suddenly let out breaths of frustration, eyebrows

furrowed in withering contemplation.

“Don’t *what*, Your Majesty?” Dream breathed out, realizing how unintentional his tone had been on the basis of his reappearing temper.

“Don’t *do* that. You always fucking—” George audibly halted his words, shoulders coming down with his breath before he shook his head. “Nothing’s working.”

“Look, past rulers didn’t always go into battle using their elemental powers.” Dream pushed himself off the rock, stepping around it to blindly reach George until the twig that cracked under the sole of his shoe gave him away. “Sometimes they just fought with their weapons.”

George turned around to face him; cheeks flushed, not from being abashed or shameful, but from simmering anger. “I can’t even do that.”

Dream had seen this in himself, in Sapnap. So, Dream paused in his tracks, allowing himself to be scanned under the brunet’s glare.

And for some reason, Dream thought it was a good idea to press further. One of the reasons was that they’d been in this freezing fucking biome for *three* hours and Dream could physically feel the drainage of his spirit. But also because this might be the closest thing to a reaction from George.

So instead of deprecating himself as he always did, Dream squared his shoulders, tipped his chin up slightly and grounded his jaw before looking at him through a somewhat lidded gaze. “And why do you think that is?”

George took a step forward, almost in tandem with a small progression of the streaming water beside them. “What?”

Dream moved into the step he had initiated. “Instead of spending your growing years on the training field, you were too busy having resentment towards the Kingdom and its warriors. Your *mother* was an exceptional warrior, who you could have learned from—”

“I didn’t *want* to.” George leaned into his words, causing Dream to almost pull back, but he noticed how slightly darker it had gotten above them.

A shadow, unlike the one provided by the tall trees, sheathed their space. *Clouds*, Dream quickly looked up, not wanting to incite a similar realization from the brunet for fear that he would lose his focus.

Because *George was creating clouds*: dark clouds coming in to raise his anger, ready to unleash his simmering rage onto Dream, the catalyst.

“You don’t get to choose what you *want*, Your Majesty. Your mother has placed this kingship in your hands and now it is *your* duty to defend your people.”

“I never *asked* for this,” George spoke through gritted teeth, one fist clenched at his side. “This...” He hung his head, releasing a toiled breath. “...this isn’t my fault.”

“No, of course, it isn’t.” Dream chuckled bitterly, the lack of his visual attention promised George’s broiling frenzy. “Because if you cared to make anything your fault, to take some sort of responsibility, you would be able to succeed in training.”

George kept his head down, speaking through a susurrante, “I’m *trying*.”

Dream was thankful that George wasn't looking up because it gave him time to analyze the ways the stream of the water augmented in its pacing; seemingly thrashing down the canal at a much more rapid pace, paradoxically mediating with George's breaching animosity.

"You wanna know why it's not working?" Dream wasn't sure who he pretended he was in the moment in which he decided to speak his next words, or who he pretended *George* to be, so the malice would be easier to vocalize. "Because you don't *care* enough."

Breaking his composure, George *finally snapped*. "I'm *fucking trying*." As if the stream spoke with him, water ruptured from the rivulet and crashed onto them in an ice-cold sheet.

Dream's arm flew up to shield his face from the abrupt wave. "Holy shit." He breathed out shakily, wide-eyed settling on the stream that *continued* in its ferocious course. "Okay, fuck." He quickly recollected himself, turning to look at George, despite the hastening water demanding his attention. "Your Majesty, I need you to—" His words were cut off the moment he took sight of George—fingers interlocked behind his head, which was ducked down, folded arms pressed on either side of his face as if he had scared *himself*.

But Dream couldn't walk over and shake him out of it. He knew better from when Sapnap nearly scorched him out of impulse.

Talking him out of it usually sufficed, though. "Your Majesty, I need you to look at me. Can you look at me?"

George kept his head tucked and the rivulet was fucking merciless in its course, harshly thrusting through the canal with whatever bottled-up rage George hadn't yet vocalized.

And what worsened Dream's growing fear was the sound of a small crack. Dream had *touched* the water yesterday. He knew the temperature wasn't as cold as it had been following the rupture. The 'crack' he'd heard signified intermingling techniques: water *and ice*.

That had been enough deduction for Dream to realize that he *needed* to calm down George before he wore himself out into exhaustion.

Dream looked up at the sky, the darkness seemingly growing around them, working in tandem with the rush of the water, and he thought, *there was no way George was using all these resources and still standing*.

"George..." Dream needed to look at him, needed to calm him down, but he couldn't take his eyes off the rushing stream or the sky. "...fuck." He muttered under his breath.

Why isn't he calming down?

"Hey, boys. I think it's gonna storm...soon..." An unfamiliar voice spoke from behind them, continuing in uncertainty as it approached the two royals. "...George?"

Dream wasn't sure when his hearing was tweaked to feel as if he'd entered a hurricane, but the moment the intruder spoke his name, George let out a punched-out breath; almost like it had switched off his anger in a nano-second: fingers unlocking behind his head which came up with the air he grasped.

Dream's eyes flew to the water, the stream gradually returned to its regular course, almost like no damage had even been caused. And he looked up at the skies, still dark, but not as dark as it had been when George reached his utmost limit.

Slowly being locked back into its cage, the dark entity within George left the scene, leaving the brunet panting and breathless as his eyes scattered on the grass; dampened with the remnants of his fury.

“Dream.”

Sapnap. Dream blinked at George. *It sounded like Sapnap*, but he couldn’t look away. Not away from George who stared back at him in horror, after noticing how the two of them had been drenched in water following his upheaval.

“Yo, Dream,” Sapnap called again.

Dream’s breath hitched with a few nictating blinks before he half-turned, still in a mild wreck as he looked at his friend. “Sapnap.” He spoke through a mere whisper.

Sapnap stared at him for a moment and as if no words needed to be said, he gave him a curt nod. “Looks like practice went swell...” His eyebrows shot up in dull surprise, taking a quick glimpse at George before looking at the intruder—who Dream had now heeded as Prince Terra. “Asked him where you were. Sebastian needs to talk to you before training.”

Dream swallowed, throat suddenly dried of any words that could make sense. So, he nodded in concurrence.

“You’re soaked.” A giggle was heard a few feet ahead. “*And* shaken up—you okay?”

Dream looked over at the interaction and hadn’t expected to still have George’s eyes on him. They caught each other’s stares: it seemed as if they were both breathless in a fog of their hysteria.

Dream wanted to say a million things to him: “I’m sorry”, “I shouldn’t have pushed you”, “You didn’t hurt me”, “I’m okay and you’re okay”, but nothing escaped his parted lips.

“You gotta tell me what the fuck happened here, bro,” Sapnap stole Dream’s attention from the shaken-up king.

Sounding immensely discombobulated, Dream dazedly asked, “How much did you hear?”

“We didn’t hear anything. Just walked in on a classic Salacian disaster.” Sapnap tried to joke, landing a light tap on Dream’s shoulder blade; carefully moving his hand from the soaked fabric and looking up from his palm, Sapnap smirked, “Least we know the idiot can direct his attacks.”

Dream tried to formulate a laugh, no matter how weak or ingenuine, but all he could do was steal a last glimpse of the brunet, who also couldn’t seem to lift his sights off Dream.

They had been broken apart too abruptly, parting ways without reassurance, but a lot more answers than they’d receive since they began practicing.



George wanted to say he remembered the exact moment in which the wave crashed onto them. He wanted to debunk what was going through his mind leading up to the outburst, but he drew a blank. And in the moment, his mind *had* gone blank.

He just remembered losing all control over the one thing bottling his emotions. No matter how hard he had tried to repress, nothing could hold him back—and *fuck*.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

The prince had to witness *all* of it—witnessed his temper at its worse, in a way which George didn't know he was capable. And he *hated* the way the prince stared back, stunned. Hated the way no words could be formulated or spoken.

His guard had to call for him not once, but twice—*Dream*. George's heart leaped with the realization. *The name etched on the anvil was his, scribbled with that dumb little pocket knife he was twirling endlessly in that very first meeting.* His eyes diverted to the floor as he mindlessly rid his head of his crown. *Dream—that's your name.*

"Handsome," Karl called after him as George progressed into his room, damped clothes being discarded onto his lounge chaise.

"You're gonna be late for practice, Karl," George spoke, measuring his tone, not wanting to cause any more damage to anyone after suffering the events in the forest.

"I'd ditch it for you." Karl laughed, but it sounded nervous, fluctuating, and George hated himself for the tension *he* imposed. "It's not like I need the practice, anyway."

Back still to Karl, George pulled off his clingy training shirt, tossing it with his puffer jacket, "I'm fine—"

"Alex told me." Karl deadpanned, ceasing George's actions.

Fuck. George's eyelids fluttered shut with his defeated sigh.

The floorboards creaked underneath Karl's steps before his warmth settled behind George's naked back; seconds barely passed before he snaked his arms around George's middle, chin fluidly hooking over the brunet's shoulder as he pulled him closer.

"What did he say?" George whispered defeatedly, head hung with slight regret.

"That you thought it was embarrassing." Spoken through a hushed tone that switched into a hum when George gave in; sliding his palms over Karl's forearms before wrapping his fingers around his elbows. "And I told him you were being stupid." Procuring a scoff from George, Karl squeezed him gently, "Can I ask you something?"

George's eyelids flew open as he slowly turned around in the comforting barricade of Karl's arms, his hands shifting over to wrap themselves around his biceps.

"Remember when everyone was saying that the sky in Salacia has been dark ever since Anthea's passing?" Upon receiving a small nod from George, Karl advanced, "Because even if Salacia is in a Winter biome, the sky looked brighter more times than expected." Dark brown eyes transposed from light blue when rested onto the flesh of his neck, a place for escape. "The clouds and the sky work in harmony with the emotions of the ruler. And now the ruler is a boy who's been mourning his *mother*."

George's brows knitted, flickering his sight onto Karl; to say he was confused would be an understatement.

"George," Karl laughed lightly, straightening them up. "The night you came to my atelier after your fight with Q..." He drew in his bottom lip, eyes narrowing on George's. "...it was *piss* pouring rain out. And yeah, it always rains in Terra, but not as much as it did when you visited." George was grasping what Karl was trying to get across, but the confusion lay within the

correlation, and Karl saw it in his expression, urging him to continue. “Wanna know when I found out that you’ve unintentionally been using your powers this whole time?” He asked, ducking his chin.

George’s eyes trailed off to the side before he looked at Karl with a curt nod. Karl gently smiled, unlocking his fingers from behind George as he brought his hands to cup the brunet’s face, fixing their gaze. “When I realized that the clouds cry *with* you, handsome.”

“Look,” Karl giggled, eyes sinching at the corners as he leaned in slightly. “Prince Clay is helping you use your powers as a fighter instead of a mourner.” He sighed, sliding his hands down to where they gently lay on his shoulders, “If anything, actually, I think those can coexist. Sometimes for the best,” He moved a loose strand from George’s forehead, watching it expose soft porcelain skin as he said, “And sometimes for the worst.” He glanced down at George, sending him a sly wink before saying, “Depending on whoever is on the receiving end.”

Upon no response, Karl curved his hands around the brunet’s face, lifting it up slightly as he peered into his eyes. “You’ve always had access to your powers, George. You’re just too good of a person to have looked into using it for the bad.”



Dream hadn’t slept. The worries about all the unmeaningful harsh things he’d said to George twist and turn with him in the white linen of his bedsheets.

The sole thing that kept him from breaking something—due to the innate fire within him fueling his agitation—was that he was to see George again the next day.

A grimace flashed in his expression when he caught sight of himself in the mirror; though his training attire never failed to make him look intimidating—just the way he liked it—the dark circles under his eyes made him look absolutely crushed.

Dream had made the mistake of not looking at the time, once again, as he jogged down the large staircase with fervour. He realized this was the second time he’d done that—avoid the clock when it came to meeting with George. It seemed as though the systemic implications that set certain times with a royal event became obsolete when it came to *him*.

Not thinking twice and reaching for the doorknob, Dream swung the door open, not looking up as he rushed out until he bumped into someone.

“Sorry—” Dream’s words were stolen from his mouth by dark honeyed eyes, surprised like a deer in headlights as he stared up at the blonde while retrieving in his steps. “Geor—Your Majesty.”

George playfully rolled his eyes, speaking through a feeble smile as he said, “Of course the first thing you say to me is ‘sorry’,”

Dream, who had initially been frazzled from the moment he’d ready himself to *see* him, released a toiled breath; shoulders coming down with the weak smile that grew on his lips. “Hey.”

George looked at him, a blink that seemed as if he was drinking in a reply he had not expected; even though it was a mere greeting. “Hi.” He slipped his hands into his pockets. “Seems as if I’ve...*beat you to it*.”

Dream’s chest gently jerked with a suppressed chuckle. “You did.” He nodded, clearing his throat.

The longer they seemed to dwell in their shared gaze, the more George’s smile seemed to dissipate.

Dream didn't have to think twice before realizing that they shared similar reasons for being early for a training session.

"Apologies, for uh," George waved an indolent hand at Dream's figure, re-adopting the indifference in his tone as he avoided eye contact. "Getting you...wet...yesterday."

Dream relished in the brunet's avoidance: where he used to see apathy, he now saw the heartbeat under a pretty thick sleeve.

"S'okay." Dream forced a smile that was hard to muster due to his sleep deprivation and the reasons behind it. "Kind of the point, right?"

George looked up at him, almost as if he had received an assurance he had been craving. And Dream felt undeniably remorseful because George shouldn't be the one apologizing.

And his remorse flooded back in the things that were left unsaid when they'd been interrupted yesterday, '*I'm sorry*', Dream took a small breath, speaking out the weight that dragged him into insomnia, "I'm sorry, Your Majesty." *I shouldn't have pushed you.* "I kept pushing and pushing." *You didn't hurt me.* "And if...if a small part of you thought that you hurt me, you didn't. Not even one bit." *I'm okay. You're okay.* "I didn't mean...any of the things I said. I just saw that it was working and I kept going because I...I wanted to see you succeed."

George's stare was untelling, but Dream didn't look away from him. "You did mean it." His heart sank with his elapsed words, but before he could rush to defend himself, George shrugged. "And it worked. For a reason."

Because it was the most believable thing he had said to him, Dream drew in his bottom lip, not knowing what to say to the impassiveness he was faced with.

"I'm okay—" George seemed to have stopped himself from saying *something*, for once, Dream couldn't quite figure it out. "—Your Highness. Stop..." He lifted a slight judging eyebrow as he looked him up and down. "...worrying."

Only if you do, as well. Dream wanted to say, but instead, he bowed his head in concurrence. "Okay." He sighed, stealing a glance at the training field that stood a few meters from the other end of the courtyard before looking back at George. "Since you're here, why don't we just...take a pause on elemental training for a day. Go back to the...bow and arrow?"

George's elated expression through relaxed features spoke, '*Yes, please*', but he coincided with an addendum of his distinction, "Will you use your shield?"

Dream's sputtered chuckle urged a smile from George, one he didn't *quite* try to hide. "Yes, Your Majesty. I will use my shield."

"Cool." George ducked his chin, eyes flickering to the ground before he looked up at him.

Dream's lips relaxed into a thin line, jaw set as he drank in *that* specific way in George looked at him: through his lashes, height difference vexing the levelling of their eyes in a way that *fucking melted* Dream's heart.

Swallowing the churning feeling, Dream tended a hand towards the courtyard, in the direction of the training field. "After you."

If George wasn't certain on how he felt towards the prince—*Dream*—he was sure now. It wasn't anything grand, just that there was an obvious shift from not having cared about his opinion to suddenly worrying about the impact of his breached temper yesterday to *then* feeling genuine relief following his, "*If you thought that you hurt me, you didn't.*"

And he sort of fucking hated it, George thought the longer he'd catch himself staring at Dream; how he would go into his own thoughts when working his next practice segment for him. George found himself readjusting his eyes to the features he'd grown infatuated with over time.

And like, yeah, fuck, maybe he did like him a little. But it was lust-ridden. Dream would still only serve as his distraction.

In all honesty, George wasn't sure if he even wanted anything more from him. He was just sober enough to consider falling back into his old habits prior to the drugs and alcohol—carnal cravings.

"Wanna give it another go?" Dream called from the target, disposing of his shield as he began shrugging off his puffer jacket.

Oh, fuck. George drew in his bottom lip as his eyes naturally drew to the way his bicep moved under his fawnskin, the way it was noticeable—even from where he stood—had George's mind momentarily scrambled. *Jesus fuck, man.* He brought his eyes to meet Dream's when he called for his attention—by his title.

That was something else that guaranteed the shift in his mindset. George readied himself, answering Dream's previous question with a nod. *Why did he suddenly want Dream to call him by his name?*

"You might hate me for this," Dream began and George already did hate him. "But let's ditch the shield—"

"Your Highness—" George borderline whined, taking himself by surprise and quickly sucking in his disengagement with his threshold around people he wasn't close with.

"Come on." Dream tilted his head to the side, an amused smile dancing at his lips. "Just one go. We still haven't mastered it."

George tilted his head to the opposite side, almost mocking him before rolling his eyes. "*I hope I impale you this time, actually.*"

Dream's laugh wasn't audible from their distance, but George kept an eye out for the crease at the corner of his lips when the blonde grinned at the ground.

As George filed in an arrow, Dream called out the steps as he did, though he never needed to. He wondered if Dream did that just because it made him feel in control—*stop*. George shook the thoughts from his lewd-filled subconscious—*what the hell is your problem?*

"I believe in you—"

"Shut up." George clipped before letting go of the bowstring, irises fixed on the bow sight even if he heard the apex of the arrow puncture the target.

George watched Dream from his bow sight, met with the muscles of his back through his ribbed black shirt, the way the fabric shifted with his muscle when he pulled the arrow out from the target.

Not wanting to dwell longer on the thought, George dropped his hand at his side, clutching tightly onto his bow as if it assuaged the mental scolding.

Dream slowly turned around, looking up from the retrieved arrow. George looked at him, impatience growing within him. And a part of him decided to dismiss the thought that came with acknowledging how he *did* care for the outcome of his practice—*because since when did you become involved in the process of all this training bullshit?*

“Well?” George asked, irritation split in half towards himself and the dumb grin on the blonde’s face.

Dream held up the arrow slightly as he spoke through an easy smile, “Bullseye.”

George’s lips went into an immediate upturn, which he quickly concealed by offering a nonchalant shrug. “Cool.” He mumbled before turning away from him, his poorly hidden smile beaming in secrecy.

Because he was trying. And it was working. It was finally fucking working.



Training was nearing its end and George, having not slept properly the night before, was ready to sleep off his efforts. And in noticing the dark circles under Dream’s eyes, George didn’t second-guess the blonde’s suggestion that they cut training a few minutes early—not that they stuck to a steady schedule, anyway.

On their way through the training field and towards the exit that lead to the Vulcan courtyard, the silence between them suddenly seemed to urge George to ask a question he immediately regretted the moment it escaped his lips, “Are you coming to Saturnalia?”

Dream visibly slowed in his steps from where they walked, nearly shoulder to shoulder. And George wanted to throw himself off the nearest cliff because Dream’s reaction had made it worse.

“I...wasn’t planning to? But...I—if, like, I mean,” George relaxed in the blonde’s nerves because somehow, Dream was still the one stumbling over his words. “I would...do you...want me to?”

George knew he’d have to come up with a reason because he couldn’t just say, “*It’d be cool to have you there so you can distract me from the open bar*”, so keeping his eyes on the ground to reinforce his insouciance, George shrugged, “Up to you.”

From his peripheral, George could tell Dream had looked down at him and then he, too, looked at the ground they walked on. “Sure. Yeah, I’ll be there.”

George was thankful they both made the ground their focal point because the playful smile that grew on his lips was not something he wanted on exposure, “I’m sure Felicity would appreciate it.”

And in a tone he rarely heard Dream possess, he said, “I’m sure she would.”

The sound of gravel crunching underneath the sole of their shoes progressed with their steps till they reached the courtyard.

“Speaking of Terra,” Dream shifted on his feet, the handle of his blade slid in his harness slightly. “I noticed something, at yesterday’s practice.” George’s brows gradually furrowed, prompting him to continue, “When you...” He made a small explosion with his hand and George’s tense shoulders

came down slightly. "...I tried calming you down, so you could regain control over your powers. I obviously couldn't." He fixed George and the brunet's eyes flitted down to the side. "But...the moment you heard Prince Karl say your name," He began, earning George's attention in an instant. "You gained control—or, at least came back down to earth."

George squinted slightly, shaking his head with a small shrug. "I don't...think I—"

"When it's the day of the battle, you should stay close to him." For someone delivering important news, Dream seemed almost emotionless. "Prince Karl is your anchor, Your Majesty."

And this wasn't news to George, but in this context, it was; bringing a gradual smile to his face as fondness wrapped him warm.

Dream offered him a kind smile. "I'm sure he'll be as happy as you look, hearing that."

George tilted his chin up slightly. "Does...that mean I'm...his?"

Dream chuckled. "It doesn't work that way, but...maybe. You should ask him."

George pursed his lips, looking to the side as sheer curiosity peaked in him. "Is Sapnap your anchor?"

The question seemed to have roused a more audible laugh, yet still gentle as he shook his head. "Uh, no." He bit his lip, ceasing his entertainment before straightening himself up. "I am his, though."

George's brows shot up, indifferent surprise settling with the news. "This shit is so weird—so...not everyone has one and if they are your anchor, it doesn't mean you're theirs?"

"Correct."

George jerked his chin at him. "You haven't got an anchor, then?"

"I don't need one." Dream coolly replied.

George rolled his eyes. "'*The exceptional warrior of the kingdom*'." He muttered in playful annoyance.

Dream giggled and George found himself smiling at the sound—found himself catching a small glint in his eyes as he said, "It's got nothing to do with skill, Your Majesty. I don't need one because nothing has *made* me lose control. In the past, at least."

"In the past—so, you *might* need one?" George quirked an eyebrow.

Dream's amused expression was waved over the moment he caught his question; his eyes studied George's face for an amount of time that had the brunet wondering the impact behind a thoughtless inquiry.

"Yeah," Tone distant, Dream's gaze fell to the ground as if something he hadn't considered stirred him. "I may need one someday." Looking up from the ground and catching George's scrutinizing stare, Dream was quick to be evasive, in the most subtle sense as he nodded his head to the portal. "I will see you tomorrow?"

George lingered on him for a moment before offering a saluting nod. "Tomorrow."

George made his way to the animating portal and suddenly two things occurred to him, easily

dialled down to one realization: he could be openly obvious with his feelings and still reveal absolutely nothing about himself, and George wondered *why* a part of him continued to revel in the wonder of Dream's occasional distant tones.

Chapter End Notes

hihi.

soz for the delay, once again. halloweekend happened n that.

been waging the chapters out through the outline and it seems like there's gonna be 20 chaps total, but readers from walls know that that can change overnight, so don't quote me on it ahah. i just wanted to say, though, that like chapters are always gonna be brimming at 10k or like nothing less than 8-9k words. just a little heads up ! (:

thank you for the nice, i hope you're all good. see you soon x

Talk

Chapter Summary

Saturnalia.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A

“Niki?” Karl’s voice strung from the other end of the line.

Eyelids dressed in light, glistening gold nictated at the oval-shaped looking glass ahead.

“Helloooo, airhead?”

A breath dragged from her lips as she resettled in her surroundings, meekly looking around her room. “Sorry. Hi. Yes.”

Karl’s sigh cut through the phone static. “*Can you come down to Terra right now?*”

Clean-cut brows drew together with confusion. “For?”

“*Saturnalia wardrobe prep? C’mon, petal. Keep up.*” Karl spoke through an airy giggle.

Head in the clouds, as always, Niki heard her mother’s voice maliciously slither inside her subconscious.

She cleared her throat, readjusting her grip around the arch of the phone. “Sorry, yeah. I can come down.”

“*Beautiful—fucking great. Pick up our majesty on your way over?*”

Niki giggled softly, gaze falling to her lap where she fidgeted with the hem of her skirt. “I’m gonna tell him you said that.”

“*That’s fine. He’s hot when he’s angry.*”

Niki’s head shot up with her laugh, which she quickly covered with the back of her hand against her pressed lips. “He is, isn’t he?”

Karl’s laugh soothed the static. “*See you in a bit.*”

After exchanging brief goodbyes, Niki slid her daggers through her holsters. Jogging down the marble staircase in her platform boots with caution, she headed for the exit until she heard a familiar laugh sounding from ajar doors down the main hall.

Not quite wanting to make her presence known, Niki lingered on the outskirts of her mother’s study, ear nearly pressed over the wooden surface.

“I know, I know.” A known creak from her chair sounded through, Niki assumed her mother had taken a seat. “And anyway, what matters is that we got Salacia to fight by our side.”

Salacia? Niki leaned in closer.

“And Sebastian, honestly, I’m glad your plan worked out.” Victoria’s sigh emitted satisfaction, for which Niki craved to know the source. “What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him.”

Niki’s features frowned; taking a few, measured and quiet steps away from her mother’s study, a multitude of questions arose in her mind.

Dialling down to one, she concluded as she made her way out of the palace: *what the hell were they keeping from Salacia?*

More importantly—

“Hey, you.” George greeted when she’d reach his doorsteps.

—what were they keeping from George?



“Thank fuck you guys are here. Karl won’t shut up about the different types of fabrics.” Quackity flailed his hands at the piling mess of clothes on Karl’s bed and lounge chaise.

Niki and George had seemingly stepped in Karl’s contradicting nightmare.

Saturnalia prep, though fully put in charge of the ruler, *was Karl’s specialty*. Through years of knowing him, Niki hadn’t seen Karl as invested in something, and as stressed and stimulated as he would be, on Terra’s annual festival.

And she wanted to lend an immediate helping hand, to be quick to defend him against Quackity’s complaints, but with George at her side—throughout the journey to Terra—all she could think about was what her mother had said to Sebastian on that phone call.

Because though she had barely heard enough to know exactly what was going on, Niki just *knew* something wasn’t right.

“Try this on.” Karl threw an olive green blazer at Quackity.

Quackity caught it mid-air, sending him a small glare before disappearing into the closet.

“You gonna be bossing me around like that too, or...” George finally progressed into the room and towards Karl.

“I would *never*, handsome.” Karl smiled softly, curving a hand around George’s cheek. “I trust your taste and knowledge in fashion.”

Niki knowingly smiled to herself, taking a seat at Karl’s dresser. Karl and George had an interesting friendship: most of Karl’s suitors, before even contemplating advances, would have to ask if it was ‘*alright*’ with ‘*his boyfriend*’, which almost always procured a laugh from her and Quackity because they fully understood the reasoning behind their hesitance—George and Karl acted like a couple and were the furthest thing from it. Only because so many years had passed and yet neither of them felt the need to address their relationship—as there was nothing to address in the first place.

George brushed past him to settle on the chaise lounge, carelessly moving clothes out of the way so he could occupy the spot freely.

Niki smiled at that, too. Because it was just like him to not *need* permission. George was the kind of person who could get away with a fair amount of things—deadly charm in the most subtle sense.

Niki thought she could spend hours watching him simply *exist* and never grow tired of it. And from the way she'd catch others endearingly staring at him, she knew she wasn't alone in the sentiment.

Quackity returned sporting the assigned blazer and after a chorus of George's and Karl's draining opinions on the shorter's outfit, they all looked at her.

"Niki gets it, right?" Karl asked, soft blue eyes wavering on her countenance. "Petal?"

"Hm?" Niki blinked at him.

"You alright, princess?" Quackity's demeanour shifted to the one he usually held around Niki, the one that made her feel *looked* at with safety.

So, through a breath, she nodded. Because being safe around him made it hard to vocally lie. And she *wasn't* alright because of that goddamn phone call.

"Hey," George's voice eased in her range.

Suddenly, three pairs of eyes fell on her and she felt like she could burst at the seams from the unspoken care and attention she always unpromptedly received from them.

George lightly jutted his chin at her. "What's up?"

Niki chewed on her bottom lip, remaining in brief silence in hopes that they would drop it. But through years of them locking down each others' mannerisms and common tactics, it was useless for her to act like she was fine.

"Um...ha," She chuckled nervously, eyes shifting across the room in search of escape. "Yeah, okay, um." She puffed out a relented breath, carding her fingers through her hair. "Before coming here, I heard my mother on the phone. And I don't know, maybe I'm just thinking too much into it, but..." She trailed off, meeting eyes with attentive expressions. "...she was speaking with King Sebastian and it was something along the lines of 'I'm glad your plan worked out', and she also mentioned Salacia, so." She shrugged.

And she hadn't stopped because it was the only information she knew, but it was all the information *they* could know. Halfway through her admittance of being unsettled ever since arriving here, Niki realized her mother would probably have her head if she revealed any more of something she most definitely was *not* supposed to hear.

They all blinked back in response and Niki felt like sinking further down in her seat, maybe even into the ground. Until she noticed Quackity: the only one who looked away from her and to the side, brows furrowed as if he was considering something from what she had said.

"What does that mean?" George broke the silence.

Niki looked at him before her eyebrows shot up. "Yeah, I don't know. It's all I heard, I'm not sure...I don't know it just sounded...weird."

“It’s probably about the battle plan. Or something stupid that tyrants wank off to.” George scoffed, his infamous disregard showcasing itself in the way he reclined into the chaise with ease.

Karl giggled at his statement before walking over to Niki, sporting a soft smile. “I’m sure it’s nothing to worry your pretty little head about.” He reached her side, brushing his knuckle against her cheek.

Niki softened under his touch when she met his warm blue eyes. Her directed forced smile spoke, *‘You think it’s nothing because I haven’t told you everything. Because I can’t. But I want to.’*

“Alright,” Karl clapped his hand as he turned away from Niki, liberating her from upholding her facade. “I need us to look our absolute—”

“How much do we really trust King Sebastian?” Quackity asked.

A silence resettled. *Fuck.* Niki’s eyelids flapped shut before they reopened, irises settling on the carpeted flooring in a silent cry for help.

“The fuck are you on about?” George grumbled, rolling his head back so it rested atop the chaise, his eyelids coming to a close at the ceiling.

“I just *mean*, like,” Quackity sighed. “Let’s say...that phone call was something—” He paused, turning to Niki who looked up at the wrong time, catching his gaze. “—that’s all you heard? Nothing else?”

Fuck. Fuck you for always trying to figure things out, but thank you for knowing something’s up.

“Um...” She swallowed, quiet as she could so as to not blow her cover. “...yes. Positive.”

Quackity huffed. “Fuck. That’s fine—okay. Anyway, I’ve *been* meaning to talk about this, like—”

“Oh, *God*,” Karl grunted, taking a seat next to George’s sprawled out legs as he whispered, “I hate detective Q.”

Quackity dismissed the comment as he looked at George, who still had his eyes shut. “Like, what, The Nether sent *him* the letter and not you guys?” Receiving George’s slow and reluctant gaze, head still lazy against the headrest, Quackity continued, “And as a blood-thirsty war criminal his first instinct is to keep quiet about it until *miraculously* on the day of *his son*’s birthday he decides to break the news?” He fixed George until his eyes grew with the flailing of his hands. “Hello?”

“What’d you want me to say?” George interlocked his fingers before placing them on his stomach.

Quackity squinted at him. “Don’t you think that’s a little fucking odd?”

“He already said he wanted to give us time to mourn, or whatever. Didn’t think the tosser had a heart, but he and my mother *were* friends, so.” George breathed out, seeming the most unbothered he’s ever looked.

Were they trying to con you, though? Niki tried her best to keep composure. *What plan worked so that they could get your realm to fight by them for The Nether?*

“Karl,” Quackity beckoned. “We were there on the day of the battle, right? Remember how he stayed back when everyone else was too shaken up to? Because a fucking Queen in our Kingdom died?”

Niki glanced over at George to see the effect of the blunt word, which had only been so blindly spoken by Quackity through a furor following her news. But limbs as inert as his expression, George stared at Quackity—almost as if he was waiting for this conversation to be over.

Karl wasn't quick to dismiss it, despite not being a big fan of Quackity's dying need to get to the bottom of things. "Yeah, but...he's always done that—always checked the battlefield for fallen warriors that *looked* dead, but had only suffered major injuries. You know, so he could bring them back to Terra for care."

Quackity allowed Karl's statement to slip through his mind and a part of Niki thought, *don't give up, Q*, but she also knew she wasn't doing anything to help the mess that had currently and previously been brewing in his mind.

George loafed his head to the side, a lazy smile shaped his lips as he tended a hand to Quackity. "*Quackmeister...*" He trailed off, smile widening. "...you're causing yourself unnecessary stress."

"And me—like why is this being discussed during *my* wardrobe prep?" Karl was obviously joking, but it only scored him a mild chuckle from George, no response from Quackity or Niki.

No reprisal from the guard caused Karl to get up and return to his task: both he and George entered a light conversation about an outfit for Saturnalia.

At that moment, Niki looked over at Quackity and he looked over at her. *You sure you don't know anything?* Is what she could read off his face, so she only stared back with a wavering smile. *Drop it. But don't drop it. But not here. Not right now.*

Quackity deflected his gaze back to his boys. "What if we get our hands on his battle plan? For when we went against The Mind?"

The minute that question had been delivered, George had finally stirred in his seat. Though still reclined, his temper was at the scene—calm in the tensest sense.

George quietly asked, "What?"

From years of knowing him, Niki concluded that it wasn't a '*say it again, I didn't hear you,*' it was a '*you better not repeat whatever dumb idea you just suggested.*'

"Look, you practice one-on-one with Prince Vulcan, right? What if you snuck off one practice, went into his father's office and snatched the plan? He has one for every battle, I know that for a fact." Quackity was too lost in his own idea to realize that every word was bringing George closer to bursting through his threshold.

But Karl and Niki did—noticed how there was a slight ripple in the water of the clear vase on the dresser. They locked eyes and quickly returned them to the soon-to-be bickering pair.

Out of the three of them, Karl and Niki were the ones always picking up on George's emotions syncing with the sky and water around him. And it would go as it just had, a knowing glance, quickly broken and never addressed again.

"I'm not doing that, Quackity—"

"Why not—"

"Because that's messed up." George rose in his seat, "Not only would I be going behind Prince Vulcan's back but if I'm caught, I'm *fucked*."

Niki and Karl glanced at each other once more, halfway through George's discourse, a different knowledge settled in their gaze. *Because why the fuck did George care about going behind Prince Clay's back?*

"Oh, that's *my* bad. I forgot how buddy-buddy you were with him."

"I don't have to be *buddy-buddy* with him to not want to go behind his back. It's just *wrong*."

"And you care about right or wrong now?"

"Name one time I haven't," George leaned forward, glaring over at Quackity who scowled in return. "You of all people should know how I feel about wars, more importantly, what starts them. This is the exact shit that gets people killed." He leaned back in his seat, tearing his gaze from Quackity. "M'not doing that, and I know you're already thinking about doing it yourself—" He shot a look to the raven-haired boy before speaking through gritted teeth. "—don't."

Karl tore his eyes from Niki and slowly whistled. "Okay...now that that's out of the way—Q, thanks for the unneeded tension—" Quackity rolled his eyes, turning away from them as he retreated to the edge of Karl's bed. "—George," He called for the brunet's attention, earning only a fraction of it. "Try this dress shirt on for me?"



The joint canopy tents covered a solid half of the backcourt belonging to the Terran palace. In comparison to all the other festivals, there was something undescribably welcoming and warm lingering in the air of an event amidst *this* realm.

Music and indecipherable chatter was the first thing Dream picked up on as he neared the entrance. And then it was the ceiling of the tent, once he stepped inside: vines weaving through the frame and in zig-zags, laced with fairy lights. Every piece of furniture fabricated out of softened and polished oak, everyone seemingly dressed in earthy tones making everything fall into place, the view of it all becoming easy on the eyes.

They were greeted by Queen Felicity, who looked undeniably lovely in her mocha-coloured dress. Sapnap did not fail to mention that he'd break the code of conduct *for* her, which earned him a harsh shove from Dream for being slightly disrespectful.

Sapnap pressed a light hand against Dream's back. "Let's get a table? I think I see Dylan and Nicol over there."

Dream wasn't paying attention, his eyes in search of something—*someone*. "Yeah." His feet moved with Sapnap's guidance, but his consciousness lived elsewhere.

As much as Dream revelled in the efforts behind the decorations of the festival, he was really only here for one reason: the one that sat at a table half-engaged in a conversation with his friend. The one that sported a silk dress shirt, dark green to complement his chocolate curls, even more so in accord with the gold crowning them. Carbon black fitted slacks, his legs spread, unguarded on the outside but a walled soul in the inside, behind the softest ivory skin that Dream so badly wanted to feel against his palm.

He still hadn't recovered from feeling his hand underneath his that one practice.

Dream admired him; his impassive eyes, pressed apricot lips, his delicate cheek resting against his fist. The more Dream watched him, the more he wondered how someone could look so unapproachable while having the most inviting features.

Suddenly the man, who was scared to fire at him unless he had his shield up, looked the most intimidating in a room full of warriors and royals.

Dream wasn't in touch with his movements until he nearly tripped over his feet the second George caught his stare. Dark eyes resembling a void Dream would *not* mind losing himself in. And he did. Holding his gaze, breath caught in between his parted lips.

Through interlocked pairs of eyes, George kept his cheek against his closed fist, his gaze leaving Dream's countenance for a brief second as he looked him up and down. Dream was one of the tallest people here, but when he was safe to assume George was taking his outfit in, he had never felt tinier.

George then jutted his chin at him, a silent greeting transpired across through a busy room where he undoubtedly singled him out from the beginning. Dream bowed his head with all the effort he could gather.

He wasn't sure, but he could almost see the corner of George's lips twitch up. And God knows Dream would've kept staring back like a lust-drugged idiot were it not for Sapnap's firm clasp around his arm.

"Pretty sure you're meant to *sit* in these," Sapnap spoke into his side before pointing to the chair.

It took every fibre in Dream's body to look away from George and to transpose his carnal-filled gaze onto Sapnap. And the moment he left the brunet's eyes, a realization settled within him—one that set everything within him ablaze, rushing fire down south. He swallowed and blinked at his best friend, who stared back at him with an indescribable amount of confusion.

"Are you—"

"I gotta take a leak." Dream rushed, attempting to move past him.

"You didn't even have anything to drink before we came here—"

"I know. I just—I'll be back." Dream only lightly pushed past him, the heels of his dress shoes sounding against the floorboards of the canopy as he made the door to the bathroom his focal point.

No way. Dream let out a worked breath the second the doors closed behind him. *No fucking way.* He glanced around frantically, letting out a sigh of relief upon noticing no one else in his space. *There is absolutely no fucking way.* In his peripheral, he could his silhouette and his eyelids fluttered shut, the pulse below worsening the tightness in the crotch of his dark emerald slacks.

He was hard. Dream opened his eyes on his reflection, keeping them fixed on his own because he *refused* to visibly acknowledge his sins.

Don't do it, don't go there. Dream rolled his head back, lips parted to release a breath of frustration. *Don't imagine the silk shirt, purposely unbuttoned, exposing those collarbones.* He squeezed his eyes shut, bringing his fingers to his hair. *Don't imagine kissing them, the feel of it against your lips, the sound he'd make.*

Dream's eyes flew open, catching his blonde strands peeking past the space of his fingers. *Don't imagine your hand around his waist, seemingly thin by how he'd tuck his shirt in.*

Don't think about how soft his skin would feel against your hand. Jaw grounded, a fist clenched at his side, Dream thought: *don't think about your lips on his neck, his delicate hands tightly gripping*

onto your shoulders for support.

Dream dropped his hand from his hair, slightly tripping forward to grip the edge of the counter. *Don't think about how breathless he'd look underneath you, face flushed, precarious legs wrapped around your waist, pulling you down—pulling you into him. Needing more of you. Needing you—* Dream released the edge of the counter before running his hands down his face. *Holy fuck. Stop.*

The growing discomfort in his slacks had his reflection disappearing behind his heavy eyelids. *Stop.* The wooden counter nearly creaked in his grip, suffering the suppression of his lechery. *Stop.*

Switching the tap to the left and waiting until the coldest stream could come through, Dream cooled the innate flame burning him at the stake. *This was becoming more than just a simple crush. This was completely taking control over him.* He—George—had a fucking grip on him.

Dream felt as if he could've stayed in that bathroom until the end of the night. Until *he* left. But the sound of the door swinging open behind him had his hands nearly flying to his bulge in full shame until he realized: *that would probably be more obvious, moron.*

He offered a timid smile to the stranger before walking past them, head slightly hung as he kept shaking off the thoughts—thoughts that *didn't want to fucking leave him.* And he almost made it back to his table, *almost* reached Sapnap—one person that he didn't doubt could pull him out of it, but he bumped into someone at the catering table.

“You gotta stop body-checking me like this.”

And of *fucking* course. “Fuck—shit, sorr—” He stammered, *it had to be George.* “—Your Majesty.”

That loose dark strand of hair tilted with George's head as his eyes flitted across Dream's features. *Why do you always look up at me like this?* Dream's lips pressed into a thin line, jaw clenched with his guts screaming to revive those cravings he'd spent a solid ten minutes trying to subdue. *With those eyes.*

“You swore,” George noted, dark irises studying any feature aside from his eyes—Dream was half thankful because his cover would've been as blown as his pupils were. “Have you had something to drink?”

The question knocked Dream from his daze, only slightly, as he replied slowly, almost like he *had* been drinking. “No...?”

“Hm,” George stopped at his lips, Dream could almost feel the ache in his gums from how hard he was grinding his teeth. “Last time I heard you swear was the night I found out you couldn't handle your alcohol.”

You remember that? Dream blinked at him before swallowing his nerves, but to no avail—voice still quiet, nearly inaudible across the chatter happening around them—he said, “Wasn't *just* alcohol.” Viridian irises met the fleshy lips he'd imagined through lewd scenarios moments earlier as he weakly said, “In my defence.”

George finally looked into his eyes, Dream's own drew up to meet his; rescued from how he'd already begun to lose himself in bubble gum flesh.

Say something, George. Dream's jawbone shifted with his restraint, the carnal rush returning to unsheath his internal desire for him. *Fucking say something so I don't have to just unpromptedly*

leave.

In a moment in which he felt like he could burst from how close they were, *and how George was looking up at him in the way that fucked with his head on an unutterable level*, he asked something he had *not* at all thought about. “Would you like a drink?” And a part of him had hoped that George’s comment, “Your suit’s nice,” which had been spoken at the same time as his proposition, drowned out his voice.

But George’s indifference behind his “compliment” was stolen by an expression Dream wasn’t accustomed to, yet the shift in his features was clear enough to inform Dream that he’d fucked up.

“Thank you,” Dream replied as George muttered, “No, I’m good.”

Dream’s lips flapped shut as George looked slightly irritated at how they kept talking over each other.

George knowingly and warningly said, “Don’t apologize,” just as Dream did exactly that by apologetically saying, “I’m sorry.”

“*How* does that keep happening?” George huffed, only half-annoyed as his lips twitched up at the corners, looking away to shield it as he always did.

Dream couldn’t help the giggle that bubbled past his lips. “That’s my fault. I’m...all over the place tonight.”

George looked at him, eyebrow slightly raised. He hadn’t said anything but Dream could hear him asking ‘why?’, and he simply couldn’t tell him that he’d been *imagining* him the moment he singled him out amongst the crowd.

George diverted his eyes from him, murmuring a quiet, “See you later.” He turned around to head to his table.

Dream who had gotten a taste of being so close to the source of his desire, blurted out, “You look good, Your Majesty.”

Because maybe if you said the most outrageous thing—given your situation—he wouldn’t leave.

And when George stopped in his tracks, Dream really wished he had his sword on him to maybe impale himself.

Dream froze on his spot, holding his breath until George turned around, not looking at him once before walking over, increasing Dream’s heartrate and nearly seizing its irregular course when he brushed past him, uttering an audible, “Come with me.” Before he continued towards the exit.

Dream could have sworn a piece of him levitated into the void, but he forced himself back to reality as he turned on his heel, catching Sapnap’s stare on his way out, which he dismissed entirely, following in George’s steps.

When the cool spring air of Terra hit them as they stepped out of the tent, Dream welcomed the dark night with open arms in *hopes* that if he was still remotely hard—which he most definitely was—George wouldn’t notice.

The chatter of the crowd got less and less distinctive as Dream followed closely behind George, neither of them saying a word. His mind was going a thousand miles an hour—*why did you want us to come out here? Why did you suggest that after I complimented you? You were walking away.*

And amongst those thoughts lived the lustful ones, the darkness almost enticing to the sinful existence pumping blood and fire within him. And no it didn't help that—despite the lack of lighting—*he* still looked undeniably beautiful: reserved, brooding and cold, in true George nature.

George's tracks slowed down near a pond, a half-circle of trees separating them from the grounds where the boisterous tents sat. Dream thought, were it not for the faint music, this silence would be aggravatingly awkward.

After taking a glimpse at the lake, George went to sit down but straightened himself back up.

"Did you...want to sit?" Dream's voice was laced with hoarseness, mind still dazed from the comely, moonlit face that stood beside him.

George clicked his tongue, cocking his head to the side. "If I get Karl's trousers dirty, he might actually kill me, so."

Dream smiled softly at that, simply because of the relationship asserted through one simple statement. "Oh," He looked down at his suit jacket and tugged at its lapels before shrugging it off.

The moment George caught onto Dream's attempts, he turned in his spot to face him. "You don't have to—"

"I want to." Dream assured curtly, desisting George's words. "Don't worry. This suit has seen worse days."

George's brow lifted with the tilt of his head when he scrutinized the jacket. "Does *not* look like it."

That's because she'd done a fantastic job at scrubbing off his father's wrath that one night—on the same day, in fact, years ago.

"Well," Dream sighed, successfully slipping off his jacket before extending it to George, whose eyes remained fixed on him. "You'll just have to take my word for it."

Because I'll probably never be able to tell you.

George lightly pursed his lips before bringing a careful hand to grip the jacket, it was then Dream noticed that his nails were painted frost white, dainty fingers dressed in golden rings to match his crown.

Dream quickly redacted his hand once the jacket laid in George's grip, diverting his eyes to the ground before he seated himself on the grass. George flattened out the jacket on the ground before settling himself onto it with visible hesitance; Dream had to fight off the smile that derived from that sleeved heart he'd been getting a slow, gradual look at.

"I had to get out of there for a bit," George said after a moment spent admiring the stars reflecting onto the pond.

A water lily lost Dream's attention as he glanced at George; lashes more apparent from his side profile. "How come?"

George kept his eyes on the water, fingers interlocked at the end of where his arms wrapped his knees to his chest. "Uh," If it wasn't for the moon, Dream wouldn't have picked up on the small rosin in the ball of his cheeks as he said, "Can you..." He drew in his bottom lip and glimpsed at him. "...take my word for it?"

He was just stating why he'd pull Dream out here, he didn't need to give a fully-fledged reason—out of all the people, Dream could understand that, so he nodded, "Sure."

George didn't smile in gratitude, but he wasn't impassive either; bowing his head slightly before redirecting his gaze to the pond.

A small breeze rolled past them, Dream heard George quietly inhale—on whether he was taking in the fresh air or the scent that it carried, Dream couldn't tell.

"You look exhausted," George stated, saying the last thing Dream would ever expect him to point out.

Dream looked at George, even if George wasn't looking at him. "Me?"

George scoffed a brusque laugh. "D'you see anybody else here?"

Dream forced down a smile. "No, I guess not."

"It's the training, isn't it?" George's voice was soft and gentle, soothing out the knots in Dream's muscles.

Dream narrowed his eyes on his side profile before his brows drew together: *are you blaming yourself for the bags under my eyes?*

It's not you. Not necessarily.

"Your Majesty," Dream pushed a chuckle. "If I look exhausted, I promise you it's not because of the training sessions."

"Can't be easy, though..." George looked to the side, opposite of Dream: voice distant, the way he pretended to act. "Like, my training, the kingdom's, and..." He turned his head back to the pond, though his eyes were directed to his lap. "...probably your own."

Sapnap's voice from two nights prior came flooding in, "*You're gonna drill yourself into the fucking ground*". And at that moment, Dream wanted to say that. Wanted to say he'd do *exactly* that if it meant that he could assure George would survive the battle—because admittedly, George's training *was* the most draining of all the three. And not because he was inexperienced, but because all Dream could think about was Sebastian. And how he wouldn't have to be worrying ninety percent of the time spent with George, were it not for his father's destructive nature.

"I've been through more intense training sessions. I can assure you this isn't affecting me as harshly as you think it is."

"Because of your father?"

Whatever reassurance Dream was trying to impose had completely left his system upon that question. There was something so accusing, yet in such an inexplicable caring sense, behind George's mention of Sebastian. And Dream wondered how someone like him could have assumptions about Sebastian being a tyrant, in more ways than just in the context of battle, even if they had only recently met.

Dream's relationship with his father wasn't obvious to the person on the sidelines, hence the Vulcan warriors being the only ones aware enough to shamelessly defend him.

So, how do you know these things?

“Yeah, I mean. Gotta learn from the best, right?” Dream offered through a meek chuckle.

George didn’t laugh, only stared back blankly. “What could be worse than three consecutive training sessions in a day?”

Dream could feel the twitch in his expression, almost as if he was entering a territory with a barrier that shouldn’t have been broken down in the first place—yet an area that held the answer, or answers to the brunet’s impending questions.

And without thinking, which always seemed to be an impossible task for him under George’s stare, Dream found himself admitting, “A hundred hours of consecutive training.”

George narrowed his eyes onto him, in an expression Dream couldn’t quite deduce, so in a small panic for having said something that silenced him, Dream quickly added, “It’s...not as bad as it sounds—”

“That’s alarming.” George simply stated.

“He let me back in for food and rest, obviously. He wasn’t torturing me, Your Majesty.” Dream forced through another laugh.

Though George’s expression wasn’t exuding much concern, it was perceivable through his stillness and his concurrent questions. “You were...out on the training field for *a hundred hours* and only went back inside for a fraction of it?”

Dream was so sure he was amidst a fever dream at this point. As much as he would never in a lifetime pass up the opportunity to speak with George, this conversation had him realizing that he was letting on a lot more than he should, given how they weren’t much close at all, making him want to fall back on his admittance.

“Yes.” Dream spoke through a susurrate.

George slowly sat up in his seat, disgust laced with concern. “How fucking old were you?”

Dream realized nothing he was saying was making the situation sound less alarming, but he’d already dug himself a hole with no ladder to escape because he didn’t necessarily feel as if he needed one until he was met with *his* look. “Not too young.”

George tilted his head to the side. “S’not a number.”

“Eleven.” Dream half-shrugged despite offering the precise age.

George’s gaze slowly deviated from his, allowing Dream time to shake his head at himself because none of that *had* to get exposed, yet somehow he’d reveal too much to place more concern onto the king—had he genuinely felt bad for Dream’s exhaustion.

For as much as Dream hated their conversation ending on this note, a part of him was thankful because nothing could get his dick more limp than having to talk about his father.

“We should probably head back,” George spoke through a small grunt as he stood up.

Dream glanced up at him before following his movements, dusting his pants off as he stood up straight. His suit jacket was tended towards him, Dream reached out for it as their eyes locked for a brief moment.

“Thanks.” George quietly said, ceasing eye contact.

Dream took the suit jacket from his hold. “It was my pleasure, Your Majesty.”

George began walking past him until he stopped in his tracks causing Dream to do the same, especially when he turned around to face him. “Stop...calling me that.”

For someone giving an order, his voice sounded somewhat frailed.

Dream blinked at him. “I...it’s the code of—”

“Fuck the code of conduct.” George sighed, lightly rolling his eyes.

“Your Maj—um, I...don’t know if I should—”

“The name on the anvil,” George started and Dream looked at him, entirely lost until the memory of Sapnap etching Dream’s name onto the anvil surfaced his mind. “...it’s yours isn’t it? Your... childhood alias?”

Every young un of the Elementul Kingdom, during their first year of training, partook in the trend of giving themselves a pseudo, which was really a ‘superhero’-like name that they felt they were entitled to because they all had powers.

He remembered struggling to find his own, his mother being the author behind the creation of ‘Dream’.

“How did you...?” Dream shook his head, completely dumbfounded at how he’d figured that one out.

No one outside of Vulcan knew he was the blacksmith and crafter of all their weapons, *so how did he deduce that?*

“Your guard said your name. When he walked in on our training session.” George’s eyes flitted across his features, the same they had under that tent.

Fucking Sapnap. Dream breathed out, quivering lips twitched up at the corners. “Right. Uh, yeah, don’t...don’t mind that. It’s...it’s dumb.” His cheeks warmed with every second of embarrassment endured under his look.

“I like it.” George deadpanned, earning Dream’s eyes in an instant. “It’s a lot better than most of the stupid names other kids created at the time.”

Dream took in a quiet breath before lightly bowing his head. “Thank you.”

George tilted his chin up, pocketing his hands. “Do you prefer to go by that?”

Dream slicked his lips, offering a light shrug. “Other than Sapnap and my—other than him...no one else really calls me that. I suppose...whoever feels entitled to, just kind of...knows they can.” He cleared his throat, wavering his indecisive gaze on the brunet. “If they wanted to.”

“But do you want to go by that name?” George quirked an eyebrow. “Do *you* like it?”

I might like it more if I heard you say it. “I’ve never liked my legal name, so...yeah.” He nodded curtly. “I guess I do.”

George’s smile was gradual, one of which he didn’t try to hide as he withdrew a hand from his

pocket, tending it towards him. Dream shifted his floored gaze from George's hand to his eyes, a smile of his own grew on his lips before he lifted his hand to meet his.

Opposing hands clasped in a playful greeting, George pursed his tight-lipped smile before saying, "I'm George." He tucked his chin lightly, "*Just.*" He said, half-warningly.

Dream could feel the embers within him strike alit with every second spent holding his hand, but he nursed all the courage he could to give it a firm shake. "George," He repeated, not dismissing the way the brunet's smile was slightly tuned out by the syllables of his name being spoken by him. "I'm Dream."

George nodded, shaking the hand interlocked with Dream's. Dream could have sworn he saw a flash of events—none of which he had the time to digest—burst past their interlocked gaze as their hands slowed down in its greeting with their steady breaths.

George pulled his hand from his, tucking it back inside his pocket, breaking Dream from the trance he'd lost himself into.

Both looking away from each other, George motioned for the tent, and they walked towards the entrance in silence, which for once, held muted smiles and no remorseful reflections.



George's mind was locked on Dream.

He didn't entirely hate it because this is what he wanted. A distraction from all the other shit that made the bottle of cognac on his bookshelf a lot easier to walk past before attending collective breakfast that morning.

Breakfast that was a lot easier to consume, not because he had an appetite, but because he was barely acknowledging the continuous muscle memory of forking food into his mouth; his thoughts travelling to their conversation at the pond yesterday.

Etching his brain and churning his guts like how his opinions of Dream changed with that story—something George took without a beat of doubt because he *expected* it, which only made it worse. No, what was even worse was the miscalculation following his assumption of the man he spoke to in the pub and how *he* would have fabricated this story in search of pity or compassion.

That's what George expected from someone he hadn't taken the time and effort to understand, only to find that he *wasn't* asking for pity. Not from the way he so easily admitted to it. As if what his father did to him was normal—initially delivering the message as if it would pose no concern.

Were you wired to think that way? George swallowed a gulp of his water, eyes blankly fixed on the dining table. *What damage have you suffered in those one hundred hours?*

Those *four days* of what Dream tried to assuage as acceptable behaviour from his father when it was *in fact* torture.

What had started as pulling Dream out of the festival and towards the pond because the sight of the alcohol spread out on the table were atrociously tempting had ended in George feeling invested in someone else's life.

And shit, George slipped off his crown when changing into his training attire once he'd returned to his room. *You got what you wanted, but at what fucking cost?*

When they met for practice after breakfast, George noticed the small shift in their greeting. Following the statement he'd made about addressing each other with their first or preferred names, the fluid "Hey" followed by a "Hi" had a beat of hesitance.

They'd been in the forest of Salacia, deep where the stream of water coursed. A brief memory of his outburst peaked George's mind and he noticed Dream glancing down at him, stating that he, too, was reminded of that day.

After a few hours of attempting to reach his powers, George tried his best not to get *too* frustrated. He wouldn't forgive himself if every training session ended in a disaster.

"George?" Dream called after having asked him to shut his eyes once his palms were flat, nearly six feet off the rivulet.

George nearly re-opened his eyes at the sound of his name, foreign from the cadence it sounded from. The first-name basis trials contained a few slip-ups of the courteous, "*Your Majesty*", every now and then, and George didn't expect any less from Dream.

"Yeah?" George croaked out, eyelids remaining shut.

"Open." Dream quietly ordered.

Upon looking down, he understood why his palms were getting gradually cold. It wasn't because it was especially chilly in Salacia today, but because a stream of water had connected itself from its source to George's hands—*by his doing*.

A curt breath flew past his lips. "Holy shit." He whispered before attempting to look over at Dream until the rigid strip of water he controlled, jerked from his grasp and splashed directly onto his face.

George's eyelids screwed shut, his nose scrunched at the abrupt cold on his face. He could hear Dream stifle a laugh from a few feet away and it caused him to slowly open his eyes, a drop of water slipping past his lashes as he looked over at him with a feigned scowl.

"Having a good laugh, are you?" George cocked an eyebrow at him, dropping his hands at his side after shaking the droplets of water off them.

"No..." Dream drawled out the syllables after having composed himself.

"I don't wanna do this sort of training anymore," George mumbled under his breath, eyes veering to the ground as he turned to face him.

Dream chuckled lightly. "Back to the bow and arrow? See how you deal with yards of distance?"

George looked up at him, nodding in concurrence. "Left my shit at yours, though."

Dream's smile grew with *something* George had said, he wasn't sure what. "We can train at mine."

Every time George stepped foot in Vulcan, he felt like the heat shaved a solid year off his life span. Not that he'd necessarily mind, were it not an exaggeration.

Practice went as usual: George would shoot the target, sometimes missing entirely due to the new

impose distance, sometimes right on the bullseye.

Dream was patient, as usual. There would be rare occasions where he would get lost in the consecutive back and forth, almost forgetting who he was talking to where he'd expressionlessly demand him to try harder to get the bullseye. George didn't mind that.

Because he'd be back to being *him*. "You okay?" He asked after George stumbled back in his step.

"Just a little...warm." That was an understatement because *he was fucking overheating*.

"Wanna head inside for a bit?" Dream asked, ripping George from his attempt to rebuild his composure. "I offer apple juice?"

There was a smile that concurrently grew on their faces, despite the bittersweetness of the memory.

"Sure." George forced his nonchalance, though he really could drain a cold glass of said apple juice.



A similar glass to the previous one he'd drunk from was slid across the counter when he further settled in his stool.

George wrapped a hand around the glass, barely lifting it off the island until his stomach let out a grumble. He shut his eyes, not wanting to cause the *exact* reaction that came from Dream.

"Are you..." Wearing a stupid smile, Dream asked, "...hungry?"

George fought back an eye roll. "I shouldn't be."

Dream frowned, looking over at the clock above the walk-in fridge before returning his eyes to him. "It's nearing lunchtime, so maybe you should be."

George pressed his lips into a thin line when finally looking over at him, across the island. "It's also nearing the end of training. I'll eat when I get back."

There was something behind *asking* for things, especially when it wasn't vocalized—his expression blowing his cover. And George could almost already feel the proposition leaving the idiot's lips.

"Or I could make you something?" Dream offered with a small shrug.

Were it not for those dumb kind eyes he was faced with, George would've readily said 'no', but instead, he forced a mocking smirk. "'Cause *you* know how to cook?"

Dream furrowed his eyebrows at him, a confused smile growing on his lips. "Uh, *yeah*?"

George, then, realized how this situation didn't really make any sense. "What the fuck—why would you need to know that?"

Dream scoffed a terse laugh. "Because I need to provide myself sustenance?" He began reaching down for a handle of the cabinet, popping it open.

George didn't have time to stop him, only focused on the absurdity ahead. "Haven't you got a chef for that?"

Dream pulled out a pan from the cabinet, kneeling the door close before he placed it onto the stovetop. "I do, but I'm not necessarily fond of their meals," He turned the corner at the edge of the island, heading for the fridge before swinging the door open. "And I thought, instead of complaining," He lightly slammed it shut, glancing at George who had found himself following his movements with entranced eyes. "I'd just..." He looked into the box of eggs as he walked back to the stove, "...make my own meals."

The corner of his lips downturned with a curt, understanding nod. "Fair enough," George muttered, bringing the rim of the glass to his lips.

Dream gave him a soft smile beneath a grounded gaze before turning around and fetching other things for *whatever the fuck he was making*. George didn't care to ask, he just lightly sipped on his apple juice, watching in slight admiration for the boy who seemingly knew his way around the kitchen.

The sizzling of the pan occurred when George had spent enough time occupying his mouth with his drink so he wouldn't have to make conversation, but the silence was only making this weird feeling in his stomach worse.

"Who taught you?" George asked, receiving the blonde's attention in a nanosecond.

"How to cook?" Dream cracked an egg over the pan, eyes following the spread of the whites.

"You *love* asking rhetorical questions, don't you?" George lightly teased on the basis of Dream's need to reiterate every question.

A timid smile was directed at the pan before Dream reached for another egg and lightly lifted it to show George. "It's just an omelette." He cracked it over the pan as he did the previous one.

George scoffed, crossing his arms over the island before leaning into it. "You're telling me you *only* consume omelettes, then?"

Dream chuckled inwardly. "No, Your Maj—no." He cleared his throat, briefly looking over at George before returning his attention to the eggs. "I think I've mentioned I don't have time to attend collective meals, since..." He grabbed a shaker, *salt*—George deduced—before peppering it over. "...the timing of training and practice is a bit inconvenient."

It was then George realized that Dream would undeniably have to miss lunch since right after this, he'd be attending regular training with the warriors of the Kingdom.

"So, no, I uh..." Dream ran a hand through his hair. "...I do consume *other* things, as well." He brought the head of the spatula underneath one side of the egg, folding it over.

George watched half-interestedly before returning his eyes to him. "So you *have* been taught *other* things."

Dream's eyes, if George caught carefully, seemed evasive. "I just...spend a fair amount of time in here, what with everyone else having already eaten and the staff elsewhere. Gives me enough time to... *venture* around." He lightly joked, assuring the misleading nature.

George accepted his answer on the grounds of his clear avoidance, occupying his lips with the glass of juice once again. Glancing around the room as Dream finalized his meal, George caught sight of the unnecessarily massive portrait of King Sebastian on the wall, to his right: hung loud and proud.

“Does your father know he’s a narcissistic tosser?” George spoke against the rim of his glass.

Eyes remaining on the portrait, George assumed Dream had looked over and understood because of the small laugh that escaped him. George glanced back at him, an eyebrow lifted in sly expectancy.

Dream shrugged, silicone of the spatula meeting the cooking egg once again before he looked at George through his fringe. “If he does, I don’t think he cares.”

George’s eyebrows shot up with confirmation for his statement, clearing the last of apple juice from the glass in perfect timing when Dream shut the stove off.

“He must come in here a lot, then.” George found himself saying, eyes studying Dream as he retrieved a plate from the cupboard behind him.

Dream remained with his back to George for a moment, a moment in which George wondered if he had said something he shouldn’t have. “No,” He replied through a breath, shutting the cupboard and filing the omelette onto the plate. “In all my years of living in this palace, I’ve never once seen him step foot in this kitchen.”

George drew in his bottom lip as he watched the way Dream’s jaw worked with the words spoken. He quickly tore his eyes from him when Dream brought a fork and the plate over, dressed in things George did *not* recall watching him put in there, but it looked...*presentable as fuck*.

Dream delicately placed the plate right in front of him, George leaned back into his stool slightly. “Lunch is served.” He withdrew his arms, leaning his palms into the island as he watched the brunet intently.

George worked his eyes to him. “Fuck’s sake, you want a verdict—”

“Yes—”

“I’m gonna be brutally honest,” George muttered as he picked up the fork at his right.

“Exactly as I’d want you to be.” Dream spoke through a confident smile, his eyes following every movement exuding George.

George forked a piece, reluctantly shoving it past his lips to force his insouciance but the moment the omelette hit his taste buds, he couldn’t help the slow realization that showcased itself in his expression: *for plain eggs dressed in whatever the hell he put in there—this was fucking good*.

“Yeah?” Dream asked, smile widening as he drank in every feature alit with a response.

George looked at him before pushing down his smile so hard it physically pained him; returning his fork to the omelette to busy himself, he nonchalantly shrugged. “It’s alright.”

“Is that why you’re going in for more?” Dream challenged, earning George’s gaze in an instant.

George clenched his jaw mid-chew, shaking his head as he ceased eye contact once more. “S’just a fucking omelette. Don’t let it get to your head.”

“Mhm.” Dream chuckled to himself, making it harder for George to pretend as if he wouldn’t have inhaled this entire omelette in a flash of a second if he wasn’t standing right there. “Refill?” He asked, causing George to look up from his plate to notice the clear jug of apple juice in his grasp.

George blinked at him before offering a slow nod following his content compliance. And George wanted to scarf down this omelette the fastest he could because every growing second spent of whatever the fuck *this* whole interaction had been was making him slightly sick to the stomach.



Dream helped himself to an apple while George was eating a meal *he* prepared and it all felt so bizarre and out of place, but neither of them seemed to address it. Neither of them really was *that* uncomfortable with the notion of how everything sort of came easy.

When announcing that he should head back, George was ahead of Dream on his way towards the exit of the palace.

Until, “These doors have never been opened.”

Dream had passed by him in the time George had slowed in his tracks to look up at the towering doors.

George had been in here a total of four times and every time, he’d notice how most doors to statement pieces of the palace were wide opened, *except* for this one.

“Hm?” Dream seemingly turned in his spot, but George was entranced by the room beneath those doors. “Um—”

“You always keep this shut,” George jutted his thumb towards it, almost smiling at how alarmed the prince looked. “What, you keep the dead bodies in there or something?” He reached for the doorknob and the second his hand landed on the brass of it, Dream’s fingers were tight around his wrist.

George froze in his spot and Dream immediately retracted his hand. “Sorry, I just—”

“It’s cool.” George shook his head. “I shouldn’t have attempt—”

“—It’s just...I don’t...my father—”

“It’s fine,” George assured, brows furrowed with confusion.

He didn’t mind being stopped for his curiosity, a piece of him nearly forgetting that he wasn’t dealing with Quackity, Karl, or Niki who were all accustomed to how he helped himself to whatever he wanted, and did as he wished when his curiosity would incite his impulsiveness.

Dream’s eyes were still slightly wide. “I’ll...walk you out.” He turned around, George followed close behind.

And despite this hallway being dreadfully long, it wasn’t enough to have rid of the tension that George was somehow responsible for.

Dream held the door open, cordial as he always was, despite nearly having his privacy invaded. “I’ll see you at practice tomorrow?”

“Yeah—” The sole of George’s boots landed against the step on his descent, his determination to keep walking forward following that awkward moment momentarily ceased. “Oh, and,” He half-turned, looking over at him. “Thanks...Dream.”

For countless training sessions, the goddamn apple juice, and the stupid omelette, he wanted to

add.

George had refrained from calling him by his name, his preferred name, for a reason unknown to him until he saw that familiar blush in his cheeks—no smile, just absolutely taken aback.

Dream's eyelids fluttered with the breath he took before he bowed his head. "The pleasure is mine, George."

Chapter End Notes

hi hi hello.

dnf are making moves, slowly but surely.

thanks for the nice, as always. treat yourselves good, till' next update x (:

Faith Healer

Chapter Summary

George's opinions of Dream fluctuate with a course of events that reveal sides of him he'd never expected.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



No matter how strange it sounded, Dream liked the idea of how names would be spoken.

He thought you could tell how someone felt towards you in the cadence they'd use to speak your name. How each syllable revealed what that person meant to you.

Was it dramatic? Maybe. Was it a reach? Possibly. But Dream revelled in this belief.

Especially when he'd heard the syllable of his preferred name spoken by George.

"Dream."

Careful, calculated, delicate. Like he had been marinating the speech in his mind from the moment he'd learnt it, working his way around the five letters, allowing it to sit on his tongue with his adjustment to Dream's purpose in his life—no matter how fresh and new.

And Dream relished in his belief because he'd had it confirmed multiple times.

He'd heard Sapnap say his name with an assured tone, confident and secured because that's how he felt towards Dream: his mentor, his anchor, his best friend.

The sentiment behind appellations didn't always carry something good, though.

"Clay," Sebastian called, spotting him down the main hall of the palace.

Quick, rejected, sharp. Like he wanted to get rid of it, to not let it dwell in his mouth for too long.

"But do you want to go by that name?" George had asked and Dream thought, *perhaps I'd enjoy my legal name if my father spoke it with love, the sentiment he should have for his son.*

Maybe he preferred to go by 'Dream' because it had been built in a vestibule of care and nurture, spoken through the cadence of the only parent he'd known love from.

"Sir." Dream stated under his breath.

"We need to talk." Sebastian glimpsed at him, only slightly, before walking past the doors of his office.

Hands respectfully crossed before him, Dream stood still in front of his father's desk, patiently waiting for the man to proceed.

“Remember when I was supposed to go away in a couple of weeks—a week, now. It got pushed forward, so...” Sebastian moved some papers from his desk, never quite looking up at Dream, never mind needing his answer to continue. “...since you’re already conducting training sessions, I’ll also need you to host collective meals.”

Dream shifted on his feet. “Um...sir, training sessions are in time conflict with collective meals.”

Sebastian’s hands left his papers, reluctantly drawing his voided gaze up to his son. “Which ones, exactly?”

Dream’s lips pressed into a firm line. *None you’ll have compassion for.* “Mine—my own, later in the evening. And Geor—King George’s, as well.”

Sebastian blinked at him, unscathed. “Okay...? Work your way around it? Those things shouldn’t be your priority, anyway.”

Dream clenched his crossed hands. “I—”

“Speaking of things getting pushed forward,” Sebastian carelessly interrupted, with no regard for his son’s hindering objection. “I’ve decided we’re going against The Nether in a month, instead of two.”

“What?” The news ambushed him, Dream’s respectful hands uncrossed in shock.

Sebastian returned half of his attention to the strewn papers.

Dream’s tone wavered in instability as he pressed, “What makes you think that’s a good idea?”

“Nick and Luke returned with feedback from the training sessions. The warriors’ progress is exemplary. If anything,” Sebastian picked up his Moleskine, leaning back in his chair. “Giving the warriors a month is for safety measures. If the battle was tomorrow, I’d say we’d stand a perfect chance.”

“They can’t speak on behalf of everyone—”

“Namely King George?” Sebastian’s eyes shot up to meet his son’s.

Dream’s shoulders drew back with an inhale. “A few months was barely enough time. He isn’t ready.”

“So,” Sebastian leaned forward, elbows digging into the wooden slab of his desk. “We should work everything around your friend, is what you’re saying.”

“Whether or not he’s my friend isn’t the issue, sir.” Speaking up wasn’t the smartest move, Dream knew that, but the lack of compassion tempted his incessant opposition. “You’re setting them up to go first, putting *him* on the frontline. And he’s not prepared for that kind of liability.”

Sebastian stood up from his chair, turning the corner at his desk before reaching his son. “Ready or not, Salacia is going up first. That’s the strategy.” He walked past him, headed back for the main hall.

“Or the sacrifice.” Dream spat, following behind him.

Sebastian stopped dead in his tracks, almost having Dream knock into him. “And do you have a problem with that?”

Their gazes met in a circle of their innate fire.

“You’re not pushing this forward.”

“You’re not in a position to tell me what to do,” Sebastian smirked slowly, shaking his head.

Through the baring of his teeth, Dream spoke through an abject whisper. “I’m *begging* you.”

The menacing smirk dispersed from his father’s lips; Dream could have sworn he had the chance to continue, to persuade him otherwise, but the man tilted his chin with a sharp breath. “I don’t care. If you know what’s good for you, you’ll walk out of here and follow my orders.”

If you know what’s good for you. The famous phrase that held the certainty behind his inheritance of the crown. The one thing that kept him on a fucking leash.

“Don’t do this—”

“Don’t push me, Clay.” Sebastian almost sang-sung, settling a warning gaze on his son. “I didn’t raise you to be weak,” *You didn’t raise me at all.* “You brought this upon yourself. So figure it out.” His taunting smile returned with his words, “If you’re so worried about him, you’re gonna have to get to work,” He brought a hand to Dream’s cheek, landing a firm tap before gripping his jaw. “Won’t you, boy?”

Dream’s nostrils flared with ragged breaths; tears brimmed but were trained not to pool out.

Sebastian kept a firm clasp around Dream’s jaw, lightly shoving it to the side before dropping his hand. “Don’t make me rethink who inherits this goddamn crown.”

Vision blurred by tears, Dream watched his father walk off. He blinked them back while turning around and the need to recompose himself increased at the sight of an intruder, holding a familiar face.

Through a faint whisper, Dream uttered, “George.”

George—who was still, narrow-eyed; glancing at and behind Dream—had definitely walked in before Sebastian had walked out.

“Hey,” *Pull yourself together. Don’t let him think what he’s probably already thinking.* “Wha—” *Don’t make it worse.* “What are you doing here?” Chuckling forcibly, unhelpful towards his deceit.

It earned him partially attentive brown eyes which were quick to return where Sebastian had disappeared off to. *Distract him.*

“You with me?” Dream searched for his eyes.

Slowly bringing his attention to Dream, George’s smile half-quivered in uncertainty as he noiselessly said, “Wasn’t sure what we were doing for practice, so...thought I’d come here.”

“Oh, yeah, that’s fine.” Delivered through another unconvincing laugh, “I was planning to do elemental training, but.” Dream went to shrug off the proposition, but George parted his lips, catching Dream’s hand movements mid-statement.

“We can...do that. I don’t mind heading back to Salacia.”

George’s response had Dream wondering how much of that conversation he’d heard, but he

painstakingly brushed it off as he said, "Lead the way."



Smiles were forced as curtains were heavily drawn over the previous scene.

George saw it happen right before his eyes and he *still* felt like he hadn't seen everything. That's what concerned him the most.

He was aware of the mistreatment between them, but what he hadn't expected was such clear vocalizations in what he thought was simply just deadly silence in the noxious air of their withering relationship.

What almost *hurt* to watch was how quick Dream was in acting like he was 'okay'.

George would have believed him if his acting wasn't flawed. *If perhaps the toxic words weren't so fresh in your mind, you wouldn't have been so bad at it—I feel like you're not bad at it. As someone who seemed to have had years of practice, locking down this role, mastering it. Which, personally, sounds so brutally exhausting.*

"*You look exhausted.*" George had said to him.

He said it wasn't because of the training and a small part of George knew it had to do with King Sebastian but to *this* extent? *Fuck.*

What else does he say to you when no one's listening?

"Alright." Being used to Dream's flustered and nervous smiles, George wasn't sure how well he was dealing with the artificial attempt behind the one he was currently faced with. "We're gonna work on control as I said." He relaxed onto the five-foot boulder, where he'd sat the previous session. "So, you know the drill. Eyes closed, everything relaxed."

Are you relaxed? George looked him up and down. Dream's attention resided with his father's words as he blankly stared at the coursing brook. Dream finally looked over, following George's silence and the brunet quickly shut his eyes, his limbs most certainly far from relaxed.

"I'm gonna ask you a couple of questions, okay?"

There was a sense of care he was unsure Dream was able to derive from him, but it had George actively submitting to his orders instead of being reluctant like he had the last two training sessions.

"Wait, um, actually can you bring your hands up in front of you—just like, um," *Forgetting steps.* "Like as if you were holding a ball." *Uncertain in something you master.* "Sounds weird, I know, but."

George complied, despite how stupid all of this felt. And he hated not being able to see what was in front of him, shut in complete darkness, Dream's voice meeting with the thoughts in his mind, making him feel slightly out of balance.

"Okay, I'm gonna start, now." Dream's tone was soft and gentle, a signal for the uneasiness of his proceeding question. "How did you...feel, on the day of your mother's funeral?"

George's eyes flew open at the directness, dropping his hands at his side.

A brazen question he had not expected caused the harshness behind his previously measured tone. “Excuse me?”

Dream was only trying to help, he understood that. But the only person who George was able to speak with, regarding his mother’s passing, was Karl. And even then, Karl would receive averse responses.

“Close your eyes, Geor—”

“I’m not answering that.” George countered.

Dream’s shoulders drew down with his breath. “Because you don’t want to or because you don’t have an answer?”

George bitterly scoffed, shaking his head as he looked to the side. “You’re not doing this again.”

“What is it that I’m doing exactly?”

“Pissing me off.” George shot his head in his direction, breath sharp with his words before he reluctantly returned his hands in the position Dream had asked.

“That’s not what I’m trying to do. I’m just trying to get the obstructing thoughts out of your head and into...” Dream pointed his chin at the imaginary ball George’s hands held. “....that. So that you can contain it instead of losing control over them.” George stared back, a muscle twitched in his jaw. “Can you close your eyes again, please?”

George fought back the urge to roll his eyes before he strenuously shut them. The silence that followed stated two aversions: one behind an answer and another behind the question demanding it.

Dream understood people, George had said to Quackity. Thus the assurance in his tone when he *knew* George didn’t have an answer because of how quickly he retaliated.

So, defeatedly, George whispered. “I don’t remember.”

Because he didn’t. His mind was swimming—no, *drowning* in an excess amount of alcohol, the anchor keeping him from the surface embodying the potent herbs Karl alchemized for him.

“What about...your surroundings? What were people saying? Did anything they say tip you off?”

George felt disgusted with himself as he painfully admitted, “I don’t remember anything.”

The leaves moved with the course of the stream, a silence settled between them. George was too scared to open his eyes, to accept that he was indeed living in the reality where he wasn’t mentally awake at his mother’s funeral.

It had made sense not to be when the day was upon him. And maybe it still made sense and all of the remorse lied within the reason behind his absence in *events*. Notably, the war he hadn’t attended.

George wasn’t a warrior, didn’t want to be. That wasn’t ever going to change. But would the grieving process be different if he’d been there? If he could have seen her one last time before she took the fall for Salacia?

He would never know. Because he wasn’t there. *He was never fucking there.*

“Do you wanna know what I remember?” Dream’s voice eased into his thoughts, George stilled before his brows furrowed with the question posed. “I remember the pants you were wearing and how they did *not* fit you.”

“They weren’t mine.” George quietly said.

Dream chuckled lightly. “Am I safe to assume they were Prince Karl’s?” George nodded. “You guys wear each other’s clothes a lot?” Another nod, another proceeding. “You guys are pretty close then, huh?” Another nod, another prompted question. “How does he make you feel?”

Through a worked sigh, George asked, “What?”

“It’s not a trick question.”

How did Karl make him feel? George’s shoulders fell with a soundless exhale.

Karl who he felt safe enough to share something as silly, but as precious as a first kiss with. Karl, who he had by his side when he was growing frustrated in mastering the piano, even if Karl knew fuck all about pianos. Karl, who listened to his theories on books he was hyper fixated on, for weeks, months. Karl, who stood by him when alcohol had a death grip on him, furthermore when drugs had made him too heavy for Quackity to carry.

“How does Karl make you feel, George?” Dream repeated.

The mental affirmations lulled the answer out of George, “Understood.”

Safe. George wanted to add but he felt like Dream already knew that. Questions derived from somewhere. He didn’t ask anything he thought wasn’t going to make progress.

“Open.” Dream tenderly urged.

George’s eyelids fluttered open, landing on crystallized water that had taken shape of a sphere amidst the space of his hands.

“Notice how it’s clear?”

George nodded, umber irises reflecting on the lustrous surface. “Holy shit.”

For a ball entirely made of something as simple as water, George was growing more and more relaxed the longer his gaze lingered in its shape.

“I was trying to get your clouded thoughts out, which would have turned that ball into a fog, pretty much—condensed and grey. But the lesson stands.” George saw Dream shift on his seat from his peripheral, but the sphere had him spellbound. “It’s clear because that’s how Karl makes you feel. Clear-headed. Your emotions, intense on whichever end of the spectrum, can always be exuded into your powers. It’s your outlet, to use for attacks, but also for containment. A visual for the good and control for the bad.”

“Control?” His voice felt like it had reached the clouds, as did the entirety of his body.

It felt like he was on a new high; in the same way that the herbs would unknot the muscles in his limbs.

“Whatever you don’t have control of in your head can be exuded into your hands. Do you feel like you have control?”

“Right now?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t know.”

“Try...try drawing your hands away from it, just slowly.”

“I’m gonna break it.”

“If you think like that, you will.”

“S’not helpful.”

A clement laugh coursed past Dream’s lips. “Just...think of it as your safe space, okay? You wouldn’t wanna lose that, right? What Karl means to you?” George watched the sphere in wonder, Dream took that as confirmation. “So be careful with it.”

George drew in a shaky breath before lightly pulling his hands away from it, noticing the gradual space in increments. “I’m doing it.” He whispered, almost as if the smallest raise in the decibels of his voice would cause the sphere to crack in his hold.

“You are.” Dream giggled.

George’s smile widened with his progress, finally looking up from the sphere and into Dream’s watchful stare. And everything was going good, everything was working—until it wasn’t.

Because a realization settled between their shared gaze. A realization that hadn’t struck Dream, or maybe it had, but it had definitely dawned on George.

What safety bubble do you have that would keep your father out? Who understands you?

Dream’s smile faded slightly as he asked, “What’s going on?”

George stared back. *Do you have a safe space from the man who had a harsh grip on you? The man who spat fire in your face?*

Dream looked down at the sphere, George kept his eyes on him. “What are you thinking about?”

You. George offered a slow, half-shrug.

Dream sighed, eyes flitting between George’s hands and his eyes. “Keep thinking about Karl, okay?”

George could no longer feel the calming wave that coursed through him; suddenly replaced with growing ice, congealing his stomach, lungs, throat. “I can’t.”

“Close your eyes.” Dream encouraged but earned no compliance from him. “You have to.”

Whatever iced the salutary wave had worked its way through George’s limbs, jerking his hands, *wanting* it to be directed towards Dream, but an instinct he hadn’t quite had the time to constitute as his own actions directed the pressure onto the ground.

Splashing with a faint splintering noise, the sphere was no longer—settling on the grass in frosted dewdrops.

George looked up from the tiny disaster and at Dream, lips parted, features hardened onto his countenance.

Dream drew his gaze up before it landed on George, strained to soft, he looked at him. "It's okay." He smiled, easily, not forced. "At least we know..." He breathed out through a shaky chuckle. "At least we know you hold that instinct. You fought the urge of throwing it at me."

George frowned like his statement insulted his merit. "I would never do that."

Dream tilted his head with a close-lipped smile. "I know, George."

How had the vision of Karl slipped so easily? George bit the inside of his cheek, diverting his eyes to the ground. And how was Dream taking all of this?

I hope you know you didn't cause a ripple in the calming wave. George followed him out of the forest when Dream stated that collective training was starting. *Not you, Dream. Not necessarily.*



What dark thoughts had clouded George's mind to fog up the clearness of the crystallized sphere? And why did they arise only when George looked at him?

How much of that conversation did you hear? Dream wondered throughout the entirety of collective training.

Sapnap would check in on him, which furthered in occurrence after training, Vulcan soldiers in tow as they all met Dream amidst the field; an invite to the village pub knocked a laugh of disbelief out of him.

Dream shut them down. "Can't, boys. I'm sorry. You know what happened last time."

"Dude, you know he'll be passed out by the time we get back." Sapnap playfully shoved him.

A decline sounded through the click of his tongue. "Can't risk it."

"What if you were to come in a little after we did?" Dylan's eyebrow lifted with an attempt to sway. "Eh? King Sebastian won't spot you with us and you'd just have to come in after he's already tucked himself back into bed."

"What if he's pulling a red-eye tonight—"

Sapnap groaned. "Dude, we can worry about all of that later. Let loose, just for one night."

His gaze wavered with his consideration. And for even a brief thought of submission, an inundation of remorse drowned him.

But with the events that jump-started his morning, he sighed out, "Fuck it."

Earning a chorus of cheers from the Vulcan warriors, Dream was about to drown all of his worries in alcohol, a foreign taste his tongue absolutely despised, but with the contents that could just about momentarily mute all of his problems.



George stepped inside his mother's office, a place that still held the essence of she: her perfume, her interests. "What are you guys doing?"

Opened and taped up boxes strewn across the study; Cole was in the midst of putting a book inside one of them, Felicity was at a shelf, looking through music records.

“Hello, you.” Cole dropped an atlas into the box before straightening himself up with an inhale “We’re just clearing out your mother’s stuff.”

Felicity offered a kind smile. “We figured the office should fit your taste—”

“Don’t.” George’s gaze fell to the ground, tone flat. “Leave it as it is.”

When he looked over at them, he noticed their shared glance before Cole met his in search of assurance. “Are you positive? I don’t think—”

“I won’t spend much time in here, anyway. We both know that.” George clipped, tone softening when realizing his harshness was unnecessary. “Sorry. I’m just...” He trailed off, words lost with his retention on them.

Felicity placed a record onto the shelf before walking over to him, curving a comforting hand on his shoulder. “You wanna have a look yourself, lovie?”

George’s eyes flickered to hers, a small nod followed. She gave his shoulder a small squeeze before stepping out of the study, lingering in the entrance, waiting for Cole.

Cole’s hand instinctively found its way to his cheek, placed gently against his skin. “Will you be alright?”

George nodded, bringing a hand to gently rest above his in silent gratitude.

Moments later, George was alone amidst a visual reminder of Anthea’s absence—every piece of decoration in relation to Salacia: the goddess, the realm, and its purpose in the Elementul Kingdom.

Books weren’t novels in the slightest; more informative, logical. Records were the only bit of culture this study had heard.

He’d hear them too, every so often. George walked over to the record Felicity had picked up. *This one.* His eyes drew to the record player like he could spot it blind. He lifted the needle and applied it so it could work its magic.

This song. Guitar strums strung out through the speakers, emulating a memory George easily lost himself in: *early Sunday mornings, he and Quackity sprawled out on the lounge chaise, watching Anthea and Cole dance like lovestruck fools to Mazzy Star.*

Her laugh echoed through the melody, George almost felt weak and lightheaded, hands gripping the edge of her desk for support. *You were so happy.* Tears brimmed with recollections of her hand meeting his to dance with her and Cole; pulling him with ease, Quackity with a little fight.

Right here. George’s eyes darted across the room. *This tiny space held so much light once.*

Light that you took with you when you left. His eyes fell on her portrait, hung in all its pride and beauty over the lounge chaise. *Why did you leave me in the dark?*

“I’m sorry.” George found himself saying, tone drowned in the melody of the song.

I’m sorry I can’t fill in your shoes. You were exceptional. George winced, turning away from her

painted features. *I failed to learn your genius.*

And paintings don't talk, portraits aren't you. You aren't here.

It's too late. George huffed, standing up vastly from where he'd leaned against her desk, palms frantically wiping his tears away, vision blurry when he settled in her chair.

He slid his tear-stained palms over the leather of the armrests. *An inanimate object that shouldn't feel surprisingly lifeless, but simply did without its owner occupying it.*

A second more spent on the details around him felt like he'd be digging himself so far into the ground where the only escape would be that bottle of Cognac calling his name from two stories up. So, he busied himself with the trinkets at her desk, opening drawers and picking up things that offered him no mute button to the voice of his vices.

"No way..." George spoke under his breath, tossing letters and papers out until he reached the naked drawer. "...you wouldn't have." He stared at the deceptively empty bottom.

George watched the people he cared about. Learned things about them—their specific speech, mannerisms, *secrets*.

And if he was correct. George knocked on the bottom of the drawer, it emitted a hollow sound, bringing a light smirk to his lips. *From when he lingered in her study, from when she would lose herself in her work.* He grabbed a letter opener at his right, wedging it in the corner and the wood popped out as presumed.

And he wasn't expecting to see anything. This wasn't the first time he'd gotten at the bottom of this drawer and found absolutely nothing, but as he lifted the rectangular slot out, he was met with a folded piece of paper, a necklace piled onto it.

George ceased in his spot, eyes strung on the white letter. Quickly looking up at the door in fear that someone was looking in. *No one.*

No chance. George lightly gawked at the paper until he fished it out, necklace in one hand, letter in the other. Wasting no time in unfolding it, he was met with *her* writing, causing him to fold it right back up as it riddled him with tantalizing shock.

He couldn't do this right now, couldn't read it.

But you didn't leave me in complete darkness. George clutched onto it as if he could still feel her hands around it. *Of course not.*



George was perplexed. His mother's voice was the most subconsciously prominent it had ever been since her passing, but so was the frail demon's hanging on for dear life with every second he spent lingering in his mother's study.

As George stepped out, his mind zeroed in on the latter. *It's just one night.* He clutched onto the letter. *I'm sorry. I need to. Need to drown you out.* He walked down the hall, fervent steps in demand of the familiar taste his tongue craved. *It's just one drink.*

*One drink, one drink, one dr—*a knock sounded just as he jogged up the second step of the staircase. George *almost* ignored it, but something had him walking towards the door, head briefly rolled back with a grunt because *who the ever-loving fuck could be at his door at this hour?*

“Hey.” Dream stumbled forward, hand firm on the door frame.

He’s...drunk?

George narrowed his eyes onto him, “Hi.” Dream’s own were glossed over; bloodshot in dwelling mistakes to surely surface tomorrow. “What are you doing?”

Whatever drunk smile Dream sported had completely vanished with his evasive gaze. “I don’t know...um,” Every syllable was spoken so dreadfully slow, George’s patience was wearing thin with them. “I didn’t think you’d be the one...opening the door. Didn’t think about what I’d say.”

George’s stoic eyes carried feigned apathy as if the sheer whisk of Dream’s scent wasn’t passing over the taste of something he so deeply repined for.

Gin—no. Dream forced his eyes onto him, still timid. *Rum.*

“Yet you’ve still come to see me.” George calmly stated with a breathless addendum of, “I’m assuming.”

Dream flinched at his statement. “Yeah, listen. I’m gonna go. This was a bad idea. I don’t know what I was thinking—”

“Why are you here?” Though previously annoyed, George couldn’t deny the slight amusement this sight caused him.

Dream swallowed, lips parting slowly with dehydration written all over. “Because I’m wasted.” An unwarranted giggle bubbled past his lips. “And I can’t...I didn’t think...I wasn’t thinking about how I wouldn’t be able to face...m-my f-father.” Though it was a statement, the blonde’s eyebrows drew together, heavy eyelids nictating at the ground. “But that’s....” He shook his head and looked at him assuringly. “That’s not your problem. So, I’m gonna go—”

Your father. George watched him turn away and an involuntary step urged him to say, “Wait—”

“No, G-George. It’s my...problem. I shouldn’t have come here. This is probably so fucking—oh *shit*, this is triggering for you, isn’t it?”

He *was* wasted, George noted as he drank in soused words.

Because he wouldn’t have said something as such so blatantly, wouldn’t have spoken his mind so freely, and certainly wouldn’t have admitted to an implied tarnished image of his father.

You always try to defend him, not make him look bad.

“‘Triggering’,” George pushed down a stagnant smile, glancing at the ground. *What the hell do you know?*

“Fuck.” Dream’s teeth slightly chattered, a gust of mist pushing past his lips; pyro not at his disposal with how mentally blocked he was. “I’m gonna leave.” He turned around vastly, aiming for the steps.

“Dream,” George softly beckoned, Dream stilled in his movements.

What the hell do you think you’re doing? A practiced voice asked himself; one he’d fabricated with his apathetic facade throughout years spent not having *cared*.

Not wanting to give up his act, George opted for his other valid reason. He was inviting his

distraction inside, the distraction that had been right about this whole scene: *triggering*. Pushing him to *want* to slam the door in Dream's face and run upstairs to drain the contents of that Cognac.

Which is exactly why, "George, it's—this—s'not okay,"

George stepped aside, "Come inside." Holding the door open for him.

Because maybe you can distract me from my temptations. "It's not fair to you—"

"Fuck's sake." George huffed, rolling his eyes. "Just come inside already."

Closing the door behind them after Dream hesitated to step inside, the first thing the blonde said, eyes fixed on the white letter tucked in George's hand, was, "You've got mail." He spoke, *through a fucking smile*.

On second thought, maybe this was a mistake.

George quickly pocketed the letter and drew in a relented breath. "Go on." He nodded his head to the stairs.

"Uh," Dream glanced behind himself before looking back at George. "Shouldn't you be leading the way? I've never been here."

George's expectant brows dropped with his expression, *he was going to be a fucking nightmare to deal with, wasn't he?*

"Well, technically, you *have* been here." George grumbled, pushing past him to '*lead the way*'.

A muffled giggle sounded behind him when they were going up the steps and George, slightly annoyed, mumbled, "What the fuck are you laughing at?"

"N-nothing." Dream spoke through a strained throat, one that contained the uncontrollable drunken need to laugh at the dumbest things.

Is this what Quackity, Karl and Niki had to deal with when he would get this trashed? George pushed open his bedroom door, but not before taking a glimpse at Quackity's: it was firmly shut. *Good.* He didn't, and couldn't, explain whatever this altercation was if Quackity was to catch them in the act.

Dream in *his* room was a sight George would have never expected, nor ever even imagined. And were it not for how intoxicated the prince was, inciting that he most definitely would not remember this tomorrow, George wouldn't have let him inside his room.

Dream was nosy in the most annoyingly subtle sense. Glancing at everything, taking in everything as if he was in a museum. George remained at his closed door, back leaned against it, arms crossed as he watched Dream wander around like a pet adjusting itself to its new home.

"You have a piano." Dream dubiously pointed out.

"Your eyes work." George tonelessly said, earning a crapulous look.

Whatever futile hurt had been inflicted vanished into a smirk. "Can you play?"

George scoffed, pushing himself off his door as he slowly progressed into his room. "Again with the rhetorical questions."

"I *meant*," Dream *rolled* his eyes, which tickled a smile at George's lips, which he quickly directed to the ground. "Can you play right now?"

"Absolutely not." George clipped.

"I don't care if you're bad." Dream shrugged, gliding the pad of his forefinger to line the piano's frame.

George snorted. "I don't care if *you* think I'm bad."

Dream turned around to face him, George stopped in his tracks when he realized five more steps would have them inches from each other. "And what *do* you care about?"

Dream seemed to have made the decision to take those steps, meeting George in the middle room, where he had remained instead of backing away. George's eyes followed his, slit through weighted eyelids.

George had no choice but to look up at him due to their new-imposed proximity. "Sounds like you're about to tell me."

Out of all the times George had stood close to him, in front of him, not once had he seen him in an intimidating light. But with the way he towered over him, eyes swimming in working alcohol, pumping his innate fire and confidence, George realized he was seeing a different side of him. It wasn't necessarily intimidating, but it derived *something*—he felt *something*.

"If I knew you," Dream's fanned rasp smelled of hard liquor, George drank in every last drop. "I would tell you."

Tone helplessly languorous with the scent Dream carried, George's eyelids grew sultry down to his lips. "You're saying you don't know me?"

"I'm saying you don't let me."

The more Dream spoke, the more George could taste the alcohol off his drunk tongue in their shared space, urging the advances of his addictive personality. "Be specific."

"If your mind was a house, the only place you'd have me is on your doorsteps."

Poetically flawed, but attempted.

George drew in his bottom lip, eyes strung on the prince's lips. "You don't want to be let in."

Dream took an unnoticeable step towards him. "I do."

"You don't." George shook his head, a smirk softening into a smile when he briefly broke his fix on his mouth, drawing his eyes up to meet Dream's. "Would you let *me* in?"

"What?" His whisper inched George's languid stare back to its spoken source.

"Past those doors you always keep closed?"

Despite being alcoholically vexed, Dream caught on, hence his confusion dwelling into his defences which drew up: jaw tensed, withdrawn viridian blankly staring back.

Dark brown returning to green, George smiled, tone gentle in its victory. "Didn't think so."

If the door to the balcony were opened, there would be some sort of noise filling in the silence settling in their shared gaze: Dream's ardent, George's athirst for the feeling he'd get whenever Dream would look at him *like this*.

It was no secret Dream had something for him, George wasn't dense. He relied on it if anything. More specifically at this moment, when the bottle of Cognac was within reach, but he had to fight off the urge. An urge that became less plausible the more he stared up at him, the more he tasted every word Dream slurred.

"Why do you do that?" Dream spoke under a breath of diluted rum that *pulled* George in.

George tilted his head to the side, working the same tactic he'd use under the Saturnalia tents: desirous eyes flitting across Dream's lashes, nose, flushed cheeks, lips. "Do what?" He matched his tone, a whisper of temptation.

"Look at me...like that," Dream's breath caught, the remaining words coming through a susurrate. "How can you..." He drew in his bottom lip, his drunken weight unintentionally leaning him in. "...make such dark eyes...look *so fucking* ravishing?"

Fuck. A terse chuckle coursed past George's lips. *This wasn't fair to him.* "Okay." He took a small step back, in hopes to desist the look that prompted Dream to be unfiltered.

Despite craving the taste on his tongue, you can't fucking do this.

"I'm serious."

"You're drunk."

"M'just sayin' all the things I won't have the courage to say tomorrow." Dream half-shrugged.

George tucked his chin, sending him a knowing look. "Maybe you shouldn't."

Dream forced himself to straighten back up, with great effort. "Then..." Eyelids still heavy with greed, he continued through a gradual smirk, "...maybe you should distract me."

Distract you. George scrutinized him through a small squint, smiling growing in tandem with Dream's. *You should be the one distracting me.*

"Surely you've not come to *my* palace, in the state that you are," That had earned a guilty grin from Dream, who bit down on his lip to stop its progress. "And have the *audacity* to ask me to look after you."

"Well, I mean," Dream cocked his head to the side earning a look from George, one that spoke of his agitated surprise that shouldn't have derived a counter-attack. "It's the least you could do for all your training sessions." He took a step forward, George only stepped into it to brush past him. "You know," His voice fluctuated as he audibly turned around to face George's back. "Since you're..."

George hid his smile as he turned on his heel. "Since I'm what?"

Dream pressed his lips into a thin line once he was met with George's expectant gaze. "Nothing."

"No, please." George pocketed one hand, using the other to grant his impending statement. "Go ahead."

Dream paused on him and for a moment, George thought he had him stumped until he let out a sigh. “You’re so shit at fighting, Your Majesty.” He admitted, almost as if the surfacing memory of George’s fighting skills pained him.

Your Majesty. George slicked teeth through a tight-lipped smile before saying, “Am I now?”

Dream half-pouted, nodding. “You are.”

George took a step forward. “What else?”

“Pardon?” Dream furrowed his eyebrows, leaning into his step.

“What specifically pisses you off about my fighting skills?”

Dream glanced down at the ground, muttering what he thought was inaudible, “Or lack thereof—”

“Hm?” George searched for his eyes.

Dream looked up at him, a dubious smile dancing on his lips until he rolled his eyes. “Hate the way you second guess yourself,” He winced. “And God, give me the strength to deal with the way you handle a fucking sword.”

George hummed, squinting at him. “This is interesting. You should really keep going.”

Noticing the passive-aggressiveness behind his tone, Dream pursed his lips into a smile before shaking his head defiantly. George was entertained by whatever possessed this idiot to act the way he was, so different from who he was on the training field or any time prior to this moment.

George exhaled defeatedly, realizing that this was his task—one he’d brought upon himself—for the night. “Go on, then. How do you suggest I distract you?”

Dream glanced around the room. “Play the piano—”

“M’not playing the fucking piano.”

“Oh, *c’mon.*” Dream titled his head with a pleading sigh.

George fought back a smile. “Choose something else.”

Dream’s eyes drew up to the bookshelf behind George. “Read.”

George’s brow lifted with his surprise. “Read—”

“To—” Dream hiccuped, a polite fist brought to his lips before he uttered. “To me.”

“Read to you?”

“Yep.” Dream purposely popped the ‘p’ followed by a grin.

“You’re a warrior. You’re into bloodshed and all that shit.” George furrowed his eyebrows. “Why are you suddenly interested in novels?”

“Because you are.” Rid of its humour, Dream’s tone dripped in veneration as he exaltingly said, “And I find that endearing as hell.”

They stared at each other in stiff silence. Compliments didn’t rouse George, not when he’d

endlessly hear them, but when they strayed away from his looks and more so bounced off his personal interests, he would digest them differently.

Following comments as such should've pushed George to kick him out. In reality, he didn't really owe him shit. But then he'd look at Dream, who drunkenly smiled and giggled with his guard down, being wholeheartedly and unapologetically himself and with every mastered rule from the code of conduct tossed to the side, and George was undeniably entranced.

He was only half-grateful because even if he was granting him a distraction from relapse, Dream *was* a handful—but also in a way that made George realize it was a lot harder not to smile with his drunken idiocy than it was to deal with it.

“Take your pick, then.” George broke their gaze, sitting down on his piano stool as Dream progressed towards the bookshelf.

Judgy, almost through a boyish tone, Dream looked over his shoulder at him. “You don't have many books.”

A laugh almost sputtered past his lips as George said, “Definitely more than you own.”

“You say that like it's an insult.” Dream looked back at the bookshelf, analyzing the small collection.

George smiled freely with the prince's back to him. “Just pick a fucking book ‘for I change my mind and kick you out.”

Even though he wouldn't. Because the main reason behind letting him in, as much as George didn't really want to admit, was Dream's father. And to prevent a reaction from the father, a reaction he could almost articulate from what he'd seen this morning—and how much worse it could be at the sight of his son being this reckless.

Dream returned with a familiar book in his hand, his eyes coursing over the cover. George stole a glimpse and surely enough it was his used copy of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Instead of passing the book to George, Dream walked with it, falling down onto the lounge chaise, eyes remaining fixed on the cover; all the theatrics that stemmed from his intemperance had momentarily dissipated when he quietly said, “You know him too.”

“I thought you didn't read?” It was a mere assumption, Dream had never said he didn't, but from their conversation in that pub, George felt he had assumed right.

“She did.” Dream's voice was nearly inaudible from where it was directed at the book, gaze still fixed onto it.

George's confusion grew the more Dream spoke and maybe that was the case because the prince was speaking more to himself than to George.

“Why do you...” George trailed off, his eyes drawing down to the book cover. “...why did you say I *know* him?”

Slowly reclining back into the lounge chaise, alcohol lulling his limbs to sleep, Dream brushed the pad of his thumb over the cover until he reached the plethora of annotations sticking out through the pages. “You're the same person.”

“As Baudelaire?” George continued in an attempt to catch his eyes, but Dream only slightly

looked up from the book.

“As her.” Dream whispered as if it was meant to be kept a secret.

She. George watched him turn to his side, hand still clasped around the book. *Her.* And something rose within George when the sight reminded him of the way he had clutched onto his mother’s letter.

“Who?” George mindlessly asked.

Hands limp around the book, nearly slipping from his hold as he further relaxed into the lounge chaise, Dream sleepily said, “The person behind the closed doors.”

Though that should have answered his question, George was left in complete darkness. Moreover, when Dream was completely passed out cold on his lounge chair.

Left with no active distractions, George *could* have fulfilled the temptations that had him welcoming Dream inside his home, but suddenly, the bottle of Cognac had become the last thing on his mind.

Instead, he was still wondering what was etched in his mother’s writing on that letter he found, and the surplus of questions lying with and within the boy drunkenly passed out in his room.



If there was one thing Dream wholly despised, it was alcohol.

The taste of it, the way it made you lose control, and the remorse to follow the day after. The ignorance it granted could be the one good thing was it not so fleeting.

The last thing he remembered was following George up the stairs, and everything else in between then was a fogged-up memory. Not remembering should be a good thing as you would have no recollections to cringe over, but not in this case.

Not when *George* had welcomed him into his palace and he couldn’t remember what he had done or said for however long he’d stayed in his room for.

Leaving wasn’t easy, either. It should have been. Feeling dirty with remorse, Dream should have run out of there and never turned back. But the first thing he saw, metres from where he laid, was George soundlessly asleep in his bed—reposed, fair skin revelling under the Salacian sunlight, composed breaths coursing past his slightly parted lips.

Dream didn’t linger, though he wanted to, slowly realizing this would probably be the last time he’d get to wake up *sort of* next to him.



Dream stepped through the portal and into Vulcan, welcoming the heat with every fibre in his body that had suffered a freezing cold night in Salacia.

He was *almost* inside, *almost* free of the worry of crossing paths with Sebastian until they bumped into each other at the entrance of the palace.

Dream froze in his spot. “Sir.”

Sebastian analyzed him from head to toe. “See you’ve already worked out a fitting schedule.”

Dream looked down at his outfit, realizing that he was sporting his training attire, blade still slotted at the back of his harness. *You think I got up early to fulfill your orders. Moron.*

“Of course, sir.”

Sebastian gave him a curt nod. They stared at each other in what felt like the most awkward silence Dream had suffered, his hangover making this indescribably hard to deal with.

“Well—”

“—Yeah—”

“—I’m off—”

“—For your—”

“—Trip, yes.”

“See you in two days.”

They crossed each other and Dream lingered at the doorway for a brief moment, watching Sebastian disappear into the portal.

Letting out a breath he had been suppressing throughout that interaction, Dream rolled his head back: with Sebastian gone for two days, he was granted forty-eight hours of pure bliss.



The last thing Dream wanted to do was conduct training sessions, so when George showed up to the training field—though Dream hadn’t expected him to because of whatever might have happened last night—he was already thinking of an alternative.

It was just a question of persuading him.

“Hey,” George spoke, *through a small smile.*

So, nothing too bad happened last night.

“Hi.” Dream replied through an exhale of relief.

George stopped a few steps before him, hands lax in his pockets, as always. “How’s the...” He squinted from the blaring sunrays but managed a small nod in the direction of Dream’s forehead.

Dream’s brows shot up with small realization. “Oh, um.” Not being able to help the small blush that crept up his cheek from the slight embarrassment, he continued quietly. “Good—fine. I’m...yeah. Fine.”

George’s amused smile stated that he was far from convinced, but it didn’t bother Dream, instead, it only provoked a similar quirk in his lips.

“I’m, uh...I’m so sorry, for last night. I don’t know *why* I thought it was okay to come to you. It was unbelievably disrespectful of me. I promise I will never, *ever* do that again.” Dream was rambling, but George wasn’t budging in—hadn’t jumped in to reprimand him for his ‘sorry’, like he always did. “And I’m sorry for whatever I...said or did last night.”

George’s eyes shifted to the side as he jutted his bottom lip out slightly before offering a shrug.

“It’s no worries.”

How are you okay with it?

“Cool...” Dream trailed off, wavering his gaze onto his in an attempt to find a reason behind his calmness.

As if he needed a reason to seem unmoved. Have you forgotten what he’s usually like? Or has something given you the impression that he’s hiding something?

“Cool,” George repeated with a small nod.

What did I learn last night that caused this inexplicable switch in my opinion of you?

“From what I *do* remember,” Dream chuckled nervously, carding his fingers through his hair. “You’re quite fond of...your novels.” He looked at him hesitantly.

George’s smile was gradual. “How’ve you come to that conclusion?”

Dream broke into a breathless chuckle. “You annotated all of them.”

George’s lips twitched in its upturn. “And?”

“Well, I was thinking...” Dream glanced at the entrance of the palace, almost unnoticeable from where they stood. “...did you maybe want to—this may sound stupid—feel free to say ‘no’, but,”

George’s brows flinched in brief confusion, smile still lightly present when he slowly nodded.

“I wanna...show you something that I think you might like.”



George remembered the way Dream was near-petrified when he had attempted to open the very door they stood in front of. So, a piece of him wondered, *why now?*

“You sure?” George asked when Dream placed a hand on the doorknob.

Half terrified and half curious because of Dream’s somnolent, “*The person behind the closed doors*”, George was hesitant to go in. *The person I reminded you of is behind these doors*. He took in Dream’s slow nod with narrowing eyes. *Whatever the fuck that meant*.

“My father left for his trip this morning.” A click sounded through the hinges, followed by a small creak that unveiled a tiny crack in the doors. “He would kill me if I opened these doors, which is why I freaked out when you tried to.”

Is he keeping someone locked in here? George’s fear grew within him, his expression remaining blank as he stared at Dream, while the prince pushed the door open.

“After you.” Dream motioned a hand to the piece, George stalled. “George?”

“Yeah.”

“You okay?” He asked through a light grin.

“Yes.” George cleared his throat before taking in a deep breath. “Yeah.” Finally walking past him and into the room.

And his breath hitched at the last thing he'd expected to see in the grand piece: walled bookshelves covering metres of the space, tall french stained-glass windows, ceiling painted in a Fresco of gods and goddesses. An antique couch set, a grand piano, a fireplace, a desk riddled with books. *Books, books, so many fucking books.*

"Holy shit," George whispered through a punched-out breath.

A giggle sounded behind him followed by the sound of door clicks. Shut-in, George progressed into the room, curiosity and marvel swallowing him whole as his feet carried him towards the bookshelves.

"Around two thousand." Dream stated, a few steps behind him.

George looked over his shoulder, lips parted in awe.

"Books." Dream broke into a grin, provoked the second he caught his expression.

George returned his eyes to the bookshelves, head fully tilted upwards to reach the summit.

"This is insane." George's chest fell with his breath, reaching forward without a thought when the spine of a novel caught his attention until he retracted his hand. "May I?" He glanced over his shoulder.

Dream nodded. "Of course."

As a royal, one would think you could have a whole library if you asked, but not in this Kingdom; imported resources from the overworld prioritized the crafting of weapons and anything that could aid the progress of a war, no regard for the arts and literature.

This, George pulled a book from the shelf, cheekbones defined with his grin as he caroused in its authenticity. *This was years worth of collecting.*

He passed delicate fingers over the cover, shaking his head in disbelief; *Thomas Hardy engraved into soft orange*. "This is a first edition."

"They..." The floorboards creaked underneath his weight as Dream approached him. "...all are."

George turned around to face him, nearly gawking. "You're *joking*."

Dream laughed, shaking his head. George's lips churned up with an unstoppable smile; everything in his room had crumbled the barricade strengthening his facade, but he couldn't care less. This was the closest thing to nirvana George had experienced in a *long* while.

George looked up from Dream and at the ceiling again, almost like he hadn't taken enough time to revel in every artifact at each corner; his wonder showing itself in increments.

Dream had followed his gaze. "Yeah, she, uh." A laugh jerked past his lips. "She had people come in and do that. Took five whole months."

George's eyes shot to him, Dream's own gradually met his. *She*, again.

George's wonder was on a brief pause when he took in the elated look of a warrior in a place that should feel foreign to him.

Curiosity prompted his question, one he asked carefully, in small fear. "Who do you mean, by 'she'?"

Dream's smile was effaced in a split second, lips coming to a close with a sharp inhale. *That* silence, again. Followed by the very same insinuation of *that* person that lived in *this* room.

"Dream?" George asked quietly, not wanting to jostle whatever he was battling inside his mind the moment the question had been posed.

He wasn't sure when, exactly, his feelings grew in tandem with his, but the moment he saw the tears slowly glossing over Dream's eyes as he whispered, "My mom," a splintering wave of ice coursed through him, just as it had during training the day before.

And the longer George watched him struggle to hold in his tears, the more he realized that Dream *did* have a safe space, *had* someone that understood him. Until he didn't.

And George thought back to the initial mention of 'she', her memory living through books, through his copy of Baudelaire's collected poems.

And his heart ached with a realization as he looked at Dream, *really* looked at him.

Dream fervently blinked back his repressed tears as he ushered, "Since you both clearly share the same tastes in books, um," He cleared the hoarseness from his throat, hand nervously massaging the back of his neck. "Do you want me to show you some of her favourites? I mean, you don't have to say yes, I just—"

"Sure. Yeah. Please." George nodded, words rushed so as to not impose more tension.

And his heart ached for him.

"Cool, um," Dream turned on his heel, walking past some bookshelves, hand instinctive on the location of the book, "There's this one, she was obsessed with it for like, *months*. Couldn't shut up about it." He passed it to George before moving onto the next bookshelf, again, *knowing* where each book resided as if he'd locked the memory of her retrieving them herself.

And my heart aches for you, you who knew love.

"Oh, *this* one." He pulled out another, passing it to George again, who followed behind him, never once looking at the book he stacked onto the previously passed; watching Dream attentively like he was about to break any second.

And my heart aches for you, you who weeped for having lived.

George's heart churned as he watched a broken soul, dancing in the memory of the dead, clinging onto the only person he'd probably known love from, the one person he felt safe with, the one person who'd turn into a ghost, too early in his life, leaving him to dance with the devil, instead.

And my heart aches for you, you who weeps because you live.

"And this is a series," Dream rushed, pushing away his attacking thoughts as he pulled out two books at once, passing it to George, his viridian eyes wild on the rest of the bookshelves as he contemplated other titles. "She'd always say you didn't have to chronologically read them,"

You weren't written by a tyrant. George watched him act, watched him pretend to be someone he wasn't for the sake of others. *You were composed by a poet.* His mind circled to Baudelaire's tortured figure in *Le Masque*, the figure that resembled Dream, in the book he had clutched to his chest in his sleep last night.

And my heart aches for you—George placed the stacked books onto the shelf at his left,

“It’s just *her* favourites, though, so.”

—you who shudders down to your knees, suffering in the acceptance that you have to live, tomorrow, after tomorrow, always—

“You don’t *have* to read them—”

He pulled Dream into his arms, soles of his shoes lifting off the floorboards as he gently tightened his arms around the broad of his shoulders—*like us*.

Dream didn’t react, didn’t hug back, remaining still in his spot where his words left him at the embrace. George could feel his heart rate against his temple and against their pressed chests.

George *wished* he could hear the voice in his head that screamed at him to pull away, to *speak* his empathy, instead. But that wasn’t him. It was never him. Words weren’t his forte, it was whatever *this* was.

And he knew he should hear the voices out, but they weren’t as loud as that of the broken man who stilled in his arms at the revivification of tenderness.

My heart aches for you, George *wanted* to say as Dream’s heartbeat thumped in their space, *for how long have you suffered in your solitude after having tasted tenderness?*

Chapter End Notes

thanks for the nice, as always. keep safe & well. till' next update x (:

Atlas

Chapter Summary

The course of events in a room wherein three ghosts exist, with broken souls; only two of which can still be mended through tenderness.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Everything was so *loud* in their silence.

Every inch of space that George closed between them—his hair tucked in the crook of Dream’s neck, his fingers pressed into his shoulder blades—all of it made the noise so unbearably loud in his head.

His heart roared, his ears grew hot; every fibre in his body burned in the comfort of George’s arms.

Dream tried to focus on anything else: the way George smelt of mint and pine, the way his body felt small and fragile against his, even if Dream felt weaker than him as their embrace prolonged—a heartfelt gesture that felt foreign to him, for he couldn’t remember the last time he’d been touched. *Held. Held?*

So, he stood frozen. Not knowing how to reciprocate.

From witnessing George’s awe to the improbable mention of his mother to his understanding embrace. Understanding comfort. *Why did it feel comfortable? What did he understand?*

Slowly came George’s fingers off his back, followed by the uninvited cold that encapsulated Dream. And he thought, *for a Waterborn, George radiated enough warmth to have made a difference when he pulled away.*

Tone hushed, George said, “I’m sorry.” Dream wordlessly stared back. “I didn’t know.”

Confusion settled within, sinking Dream further down into the unknown the longer he tried to understand the reason behind his sudden care. “It’s...it’s fine. I never spoke about her.” Eyebrows furrowed on George’s unreadable expression, Dream continued through a forced smile. “Seriously, it’s cool. She, uh...passed, like, years ago.”

“That’s n...” George had clearly already begun a delivery he hadn’t properly formulated, imminent words swallowed and shut behind his now pressed lips.

The silence resettled, the internal noise returned. *What were you going to say?*

Why did you hug me, George? Dream looked at him, *what are you trying to say?* George looked at the ground.

"I think..." George's voice was nearly soundless until he spoke up, finally looking up into Dream's eyes. "...I think these books were meant to be read *here*." His eyes did an amiable once-over of the room before they retired to Dream. "So, if it's no...trouble, could I read them...here? Instead of bringing them home?"

Not only could Dream not say 'no' to the angel-faced brunet, but the sheer thought of this room seeing the life it so desperately deserved had him thinking, *she would love that*.

Dream's lips swung up into a soft grin. "Of course."

George almost met his smile but a thought stirred a pout. "For the days that your father's away, of course."

What he went to say next wasn't thought out. But how could he *think* when the only person he felt fit right into this room better than his mother agreed to bring it back to life?

"Mm. I don't know," Dream feigned a thought, briefly glancing up at the ceiling. "Someone told me I should consider keeping things from my father," He began, too late to reprimand himself. "Just as he keeps things from me."

George pushed down his smile through pursed lips directed at the ground. "Sounds like a smart person."

Breaking into an unstoppable toothy smile at the sight of prominent, fair cheekbones, Dream chuckled. "He is."

The smile mirrored George's lips, causing him to look to his side, away from Dream. "Cool. Yeah. 'Cause...two days isn't enough time..." He looked over the room, analyzing the small things as he did. "So..."

Dream watched him do so, words sounding mindless as he. "You're welcome here any time."

George's gaze swooped to him, copper irises taking Dream in from head to toe before he looked over his shoulder. "The piano."

Dream took a few seconds to himself, taking a breath containing all the tension that remained heavy in the air before breathing it out at the sight of George: magnetized by the instrument, doe eyes following dainty fingers over the piano.

Looking over at him with a quirk in his eyebrow, George sported a half-smile. "Did she play?"

Dream chuckled lightly. "Uh, no."

George gave him a curt nod, glancing down at the piano. "Just a decoration piece then?"

"No, actually." A nervous hand kneaded the nape of his neck. "She...bought it for me."

Just as presumed, George's eyes drew to him instantly. "For *you*? You play then?"

Dream's lips quivered into a nervous turn. "No, we um, we were...planning to learn together."

That look returned on his face, the very one he sported at the initial mention of Dream's mother. "Never did?" He returned his eyes to the piano, gentle hand resting atop the wooden frame.

Dream watched him intently, "Never had the time. With training and all, so..." His voice died out with the progressing syllables.

George never looked up, no twitch in his features to determine the toneless voice when he asked, “D’you want to?” Upon hearing no reply, he looked over at Dream through a floored gaze. “Learn?”

Dream crossed his hands behind him, straightening at the proposition that he could sense on the tip of George’s tongue. “Doubt I’d be as good at retaining stuff now whereas if I was younger, but.”

A hesitant shrug from Dream earned a soft-curved smile. “It’s never too late.”

When did you get so soft-spoken? Dream wondered, remembering George’s low tone, how it always held a coldness to it; detached and intimidating.

“Are you...” Dream cracked a smile with a small breath. “...you offering?”

George tilted his head with a jut of his bottom lip, looking to his side. “Figure I owe you something for those training sessions,” He shot him a playful glare. “As I recall you saying last night.”

Dream’s features scrunched up. “God. Yeah, *again*, listen, I am so sorry for the things I said—”

“Dream?” His name spoken through *his* cadence followed by *those goddamn eyes* stole the remaining words from Dream. “I’m going to stitch your lips if it means I never get to hear you say ‘sorry’ again.”

Dream opened his mouth to say something until he bit his bottom lip with futile guilt.

George cocked his head to the side. “You were going to say ‘sorry’ just then, weren’t you?”

Letting go of his bottom lip, Dream grinned, shaking his head. “*No...*” Whispered, but skittish enough that it earned him a shake of the brunet’s head.

Moments in which George wouldn’t try to hide his smile from Dream had him wondering, *is this you letting me in?*

“Where did the want to learn come about?” George walked around the piano as if he were analyzing every inch of it.

Dream watched him with an amount of attention he’s never given anyone else before. “Chopin.”

George scoffed. “Of course.”

And Dream thought, *if this is you letting me in, should I feel ever so comfortable to—* “Pardon me, George, but...” Receiving a look from over the brunet’s shoulder, he continued through a playful smile. “...that sounded quite pretentious.”

George diverted his look. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“Is Chopin not good enough for you?” Dream dared himself to press.

George’s shoulders lightly rose with a laugh he suppressed. “Chopin’s great. Hence the popularity.” Before Dream could reiterate his previous statement, George turned to face him. “Why him?”

The decline in Dream’s smile happened with the surmounting memory of night terrors, his mother’s records with Chopin’s *12 Études* playing softly, as soft as her running fingers through his hair, lulling him to a kinder slumber.

You know of her now, George looked at him, half-expectant, fully patient, and if this is you letting me in, should I let you in, too?

Can I trust you? Dream swallowed the lead that formed the heart-wrenching memory of her ghost that sat on the very couch at George's left, where he briefly looked before returning his gaze to him. *Why do I feel like I can, when I barely know you?*

"I'd have a lot of, um...nightmares, as a kid. She'd, uh..." He looked away from him, down at the ground. "Play the records of his compositions. I'd..." He chuckled, sad enough that it almost made him wince. "I'd knock right out, so."

George's eyelids fluttered with an inhale, gaze settling to the metres of space between them. "Hm," His hands slid into his pockets—looking down where they hid behind the fabric, Dream could have sworn his fists were clenched. "Well...Chopin is a bit advanced for beginner piano lessons—"

Dream immediately looked at him, a breathless laugh bubbling past his lips. "I wasn't planning on learning Chopin, George—"

"Oh, no?" Eyebrows slightly furrowed, George tilted his head with a blatant smile.

Dream shook his head, amusement reaching his eyes. "No."

A comfortable silence fell until George brought up their training session, which had Dream leading them back to the field.

Whatever wasn't there before had settled between them, leaving Dream to wonder why that 'something' between them felt as if it was *resettling*, returning to its rightful place, when he didn't recall it ever existing in their midst.

Whatever it was, Dream noticed George's smiles more, ones he stopped trying to hide. And he thought, *if this is you letting me in, can you lock the door behind me?*



There was something George was unsure of as of recent. As of that hug that was followed by Dream's response. *"She passed years ago."*

George wanted to tell him, *that's not what I'm apologizing for. I'm apologizing for not having seen you, noticed you through my darkness as well as your own.*

The unsure thing lied with him in bed that morning before a training session. A training session that he was *looking forward to*. That's what he was unsure of. What he used to despise getting up for, he suddenly found himself getting ready with a lot less reluctance.

He liked to think his reason lay in that room, Dream's mother's safe haven. He liked to think that his reason was with the abundance of books and that grand piano, pads of his fingers itching to feel those ivory bones, heart striving for the sound it would make from having sat alone for so long.

He *liked* to think that.

But he knew a big part of it lied within Dream. Because as much as he adored *that* room, the books and the piano were just benefits. His reason was behind that kind smile and that mouth of honey. And those forlorn eyes—having seen and witnessed too much, at such a young age.

And in avoiding his mother's letter which stared into his soul where it rested on his dresser,

George *needed* distractions. Needed a new focal point. Away from the company of his dormant demon and from the alcohol at his disposal.

Essentially, he sort of needed Dream.



Training went as it always did. Dream seated on that boulder, pretty under the Salacia sunlight; his skin relishing in its rays, golden blonde hair, delicate dawn-tinted lips.

Are you aware of your fragileness? I think the sun is. And so am I.

“Don’t shut your eyes this time.” Dream said when George stood in front of the brook, palms flat above the stream of water. “I wanna see how you do without having to go into your head.”

George huffed lightly. “Isn’t that the whole point?”

“You should be able to use your powers without having to blind yourself.” A gentle chuckle sounded from behind him. “I fear that’s gonna cause a bit of a problem amidst a battle.”

George smiled to himself. “They’re open.”

“I’m going to stay a little close behind, just in case. The first time I tried this with Sapnap, he...sort of fainted.”

George’s brows shot up at the statement. “Can’t wait.”

“It’s just what happens when you rely less on your emotions and more on your resources to generate your powers.” His voice was close, his cologne circled George’s space.

“So to use my powers, I have the choice between....blinding myself or momentarily passing away.”

“Only because you have yet to master them, George.” Honeyed-tone; doting in a way that didn’t throw George off.

When George succeeded in augmenting the course of the rivulet—not after having failed multiple times—he hadn’t expected to faint, but he also hadn’t expected a drop of blood to drip from his nostril, pass his cupid’s bow and onto his lips.

“Um.” George’s tongue instinctively poked out when the foreign feeling coursed over his lips. “Dream?”

Dream, who had stayed behind, coaxing and coaching, had no idea of the nosebleed, but alarmed, as always, he asked, “You okay?”

George dropped his hands, the surprise that should have happened at the sheer sight of how quickly he desisted his powers was soon forgotten when he turned around, head slightly bowed before he looked up at Dream.

Dream’s gaze was stiff. “We should take a break.”

“It’s just a nosebleed. I’m fine.” George chuckled, bringing his sleeved forearm to wipe the blood off.

Dream tilted his head to the side with a small sigh, “It could’ve been worse, though. We’ve only an

hour left of training, anyway. We can cut it short if that's fine with you."

George smiled, voice muffled underneath his lightly closed fist. "Sure."

"I'll walk you in and head out—"

"Will you bring me back to that room, instead?" George coolly asked, though maybe he shouldn't have been so blatant judging by the look that followed his suggestion.

Until a smile slipped on Dream's lips, soothing George's brief worry for having over-stepped. "Wha—my mom's study?" George nodded. "I mean...sure—yes, I can. If...if that's what you'd like."

"If it's okay with you—"

"It's more than okay with me, George."



It was a weird feeling—waiting on George before they went and did something that wasn't training. Dream wasn't sure how he was adjusting to this clear shift in their midst, but he knew he'd take just about any opportunity to spend time with George.

The reason Dream wanted to hear him play the piano so badly was because of how drawn George was to it; he settled onto the stool with ease, fingers ghosting over the keys.

Dream was lost in admiration, his legs taking him to the couch before he sat on the armrest, hands crossed in between his spread knees. "Are you going to play something?"

George scoffed, meekly looking at him before returning his eyes to the keys. "You would like that, wouldn't you?"

Dream's brows knitted in confusion. "What—"

"You asked me to play for you when you came down to my palace." George broke into a smile when Dream's expression dropped. "Twice, might I add."

Dream pinched the bridge of his nose, screwing his eyes shut. "God, please don't."

George chuckled breathlessly, pressing on a few keys that emitted no melody. Dream took that time to recollect himself in memoriam of his drunken mistakes.

"So," George began, meriting Dream's eyes though the brunet's were still drawn over the keys. "What would you like to learn, Dream?" *What is this tone, which you've recently adopted around me?* A soft-curved smile grew on his lips. "Any specific requests?" *Whatever it is, don't stop.*

Dream squeezed his own hands, pressing them into the armrest. "I only know intermediate pieces."

George hummed to himself with a small nod, stretching his fingers over the keys before mindlessly saying, "Come here." Dream froze in his seat, suddenly losing all feeling in his legs, nearly sinking down to the floor when George looked at him with a small tilt of his head. "I can't teach you when you're sitting over there, can I?"

Fuck. Dream's brows lifted before he slowly rose from his seat. *You could have worded that differently to save me the heart attack.* Hesitant steps brought him to the stool, his heart pounding in his chest when George looked up at him; their height difference apparent now more than ever.

George slid to the left, freeing a spot for him.

This stool was big enough for the both of them, but not big enough to leave a mere inch of space between their arms as they pressed against the other.

Dream's eyes strained onto the keys, ever-so-slightly catching glimpses of George's hands, how delicate they were over the black and white. *Nails painted in that same colour under the Terran night sky, dainty fingers sporting the same rings.* He made the mistake of looking at him because when he did, he realized how close they were, only because their breaths collided, *only because you were looking at me, too.*

Both of them immediately looked away, George quickly said, "I want you to follow my left hand, okay?"

Dream's tone was raspy with his concurrence. "Okay."

Pine and mint. "Pinky on B," *Frost white.* "Middle on D sharp," *Pine.* "Thumb on F sharp," *Sweet mint.* "And you pressed down on these, eight times." George followed through with his own directions, the singular chord sounded through the hammers repeatedly. "You got that, you think?"

Dream let out a quiet breath. "I think, yeah."

"Cool," George spoke through a small chuckle. "Next one."

The chords were lightly memorized, Dream attempted his best to focus on the taught material instead of the teacher.

"I'll play the right, you play the left." George had said before drawing his thumb and pinky over the keys.

"That's funny." Dream found himself speaking his thoughts, which were instantly mentally rebuked when George looked at him. "Since you're—"

"Left-handed," George concluded, earning Dream's wavering eyes. "That *is* funny, Dream."

A new addition to the cadence his name sounded through—playful, light.

Dream stifled a laugh at the look he received. "Something tells me you're being sarcastic."

"Funny *and* perceivable—what can't you do?" George tipped his head to the side.

The smile they wore warmed Dream's heart so much he felt like his face was beet red the longer he looked at him. Naturally, his eyes fell to George's lips, which were so undeniably close to his, a mere push could derive the feel of which he craved.

"Many things." Dream cleared his throat, returning his eyes to the piano. "Like this, for example."

"You've got it." George had seemingly been thinking about something too, a sharp breath was taken like he'd caught himself off guard. "Ready?"

"Yes?" Dream half shrugged, lightly grimacing at his fingers which twitched over the keys.

"Good, 'cause you're starting us off." George tucked his left hand in between his legs, keeping his right on the brink of action. "And remember, switch when I tell you to."

Dream realized, then, that he hadn't really heard George play. Thus urging him to apply his learnings quicker than he'd like, just so he could see George's fingers work their magic over the black and white.

Until he kept getting distracted by George's hands.

Missing a note, the piano emitting an ugly sound, Dream huffed.

"It's alright. Start again." George's voice lulled into his space.

And they started again, and Dream didn't mess up this time. Not for himself and not to impress *him*, but so as to allow George to play deliberately, which he probably could do with his eyes closed.

And it was so pretty, how his fingers fell in harmony with each key, like skin to spruce were suddenly magnetized things.

"Switch." George quietly ordered, Dream followed.

And he wasn't sure *how* he was managing this when all he could think about was *George*—how close they sat, how their fingers lightly danced over the keys, different complexions in unison, pumping a melody so simple yet so effective.

George was audibly speaking through a smile as he once again said, "Switch."

The last note resonated through the hammers, falling over them and into the room, followed by the creaks of the stool, shuffling of clothes as they both retrieved their hands.

Dream wasn't sure who looked first, but they caught each other's gaze. The deafening silence returned behind those dark brown eyes Dream couldn't get enough of.

"Not so bad." George's eyes flitted a few centimetres down his face.

Dream watched his lips move. "Just the first part, right?"

Almost as if they had to remain quiet, George spoke slowly, carefully. "Yeah, but..." His tongue slicked his lips. "...we've got time."

Dream was fully drawn in, George's voice almost sounded alien-like.

There was something so strange behind how easy it *would* have felt for Dream to lean in, and from George's silence accompanied with his eyes which fixed Dream's lips, he thought it would have felt easy for him too.

And for a split second, Dream had the urge to *do it*.

And fuck, was he thankful when a knock sounded from the doors, snapping the both of them out of their trance. They blinked at each other for a moment before Dream ceased eye contact, getting up from the stool slowly before reaching the door.

"I'll be honest, I thought I had genuinely lost the plot when I heard music coming from here, but you're actually *in* here—"

"Sap—"

"What the *fuck* do you think you're doing?"

Dream let out a breath he had been holding with his and George's shared gaze. "George is in here with me." He lowered his voice, passing a hint to Sapnap so he could do the same.

Sapnap's eyebrows lightly shot up. "Oh... 'George', minus the title. When did this happen?"

"He wanted to check the place out."

Whatever teasing smile Sapnap previously held dissipated with his furrowed eyebrows. "And you just let him? Like it's a fucking zoo or some shit— isn't Sebastian gonna kill you for this?"

"Do you see him anywhere?" Dream cocked an eyebrow.

Sapnap's own shot up again, this time a lot more surprised than taunting. "Damn."

Dream lightly rolled his eyes. "What?"

"Nothing," Sapnap jutted his bottom lip. "Just probably the first time you went behind his back. For something this big, too."

That was before George, He wanted to say, but opted for the most blatant truth, one Sapnap was made fully aware of. "I like him, Sap."

Sapnap didn't need a name for the breathlessly spoken statement. "I know," He quietly said. "Look, I was looking for you because collective training is starting in, like, five minutes, so—"

Dream's eyelids flapped shut with a sharp breath. "Shit."

"But, yo, hey," A firm grip on his shoulder caused Dream to look at him. "I can take over today."

"Seriously?"

Sapnap clicked his tongue with a small shrug. "Yeah, fuck it, why not? They're already excelling, they don't need much assistance. And you clearly got your hands full here."

Dream broke into a light grin. "Thanks, brother."

Sapnap winked at him before retrieving his hand, headed the other way until, "Dream,"

Halfway through closing the door, Dream peaked his head through. "Yeah?"

"I know you like him," Sapnap brought his voice down. "But...just be careful, okay? Make sure he's not...just using you."

An indifferent scoff jerked past his lips. "*Using* me—for what, Nick?"

"Dude," Sapnap squared his shoulders with an inhale. "When you guys stepped away during Saturnalia, I overheard some shit from Terrans and Eurans," He sucked the air through his teeth with a drop of his head. "The guy's been around."

Sapnap was protective, Dream knew that much, so he took that warning with a grain of salt. Because he was basing his protectiveness on the person *he* knew, not the person that held Dream following the deliverance of his most vulnerable secret.

"So have we, idiot. We kinda live in a small world—"

Sapnap shot him a cunning glare. "Just—"

“Yeah, yeah.” Dream coincided, not wanting to open a can of worms as he drew a flat line with his hand. “I’ll be careful.” He lightly sang-sung, earning a reluctant smile from his best friend before waving him off as the door shut between them.

Maybe Sapnap was worried *because* he could see it: the difference behind Dream’s eyes when he’d speak, look or think about George. Dream used to look at suitors with lust, but *George*—Dream looked at him with a mixture of both, adding to the weight of his feelings for him.

“Collective training?” George asked when Dream walked over to retake his spot on their shared stool.

“Yeah, but—”

“I’ll go—”

“No, uh.” He stopped himself at his eagerness, followed by the brunet’s knowing smile which mirrored Dream’s lips. “Um...Sapnap’s taking care of it. For today.”

“...Why?”

Because he knows I’d rather be here with you. “Just...” Dream offered a slow, half-shrug. “...felt like it, I guess.”

George drew in his bottom lip, lightly hanging his head. “Hm.” He looked at the ivory keys before returning his gaze to Dream. “Could you get me a piece of paper and...a pen, please?”

Dream felt like he wanted to capture the purity behind something as simple as a ‘please’, spoken through that caramelized tone and past those angelic lips. “Of course.” He bowed his head, retrieving the requested items before taking a seat on the stool.

George muttered a quiet ‘thanks’ under his breath before shutting the piano’s fallboard, flattening out the paper onto it. “I’m going to write down the chords,” Dream was trying so hard to tear his eyes off the brunet’s lashes from when he had leaned over to write, “And with, like, drawings so you can locate the notes,” He scribbled something, Dream watched him instead of the written directions. “And...” George mustn’t have noticed how close his head was, how his hair brushed against Dream’s bicep as he continued to aimlessly write, but Dream noticed and he was *fucking losing it*. “...you just have to practice it, over and over,” *A click of his pen*. “Until you get it.”

“And what will you do, in the meantime?” Dream couldn’t even hear himself speak, let alone when George leaned back from the paper to look up at him.

“Read.” George plainly stated. “I didn’t come here *just* for you.” Said through furrowed eyebrows, but a teasing smile.

“Are you gonna be able to read through my horrible playing?”

George shrugged as he graciously swung a leg over the stool when standing up, Dream’s eyes drew up to meet his. “I should be the compromising one,” George leaned down slightly after having stopped behind him on his way to the couch; Dream’s breath caught when he felt the brunet’s breath against his ear. “Not you, Dream.”

To say he was in a mild state of shock was an understatement until his eyes softened at the sight; the brunet ever-so comfortably plopping down, legs propped up onto the couch, book in hand before he began reading.

It all felt so *right*. Seeing him here, silently reading, unbothered in a room that should feel foreign to him. George must've noticed he was watching because he looked over, catching him in the act.

"Comfortable?" Dream's voice came out through a faint whisper.

George imperceptibly nodded, fingers curved over the arch of the open book.

"Good." *As long as it makes you come back to this room, on that couch, for as many times as you'd like.* "That's good."



Time became impalpable when George reached the hundredth page of Kafka's diaries.

They had both been at their respective endeavours for a whole hour if George had to guess. An hour that held intervals of piano melodies and the occasional scruffing emitting flipped pages.

His fingers itched for his mother's letter that resided on his desk, but the longer he stayed here, the longer he spoke with him, the more he seemed to drift away from the urge.

And it was so easy, to lose myself in the sight of you, George lifted his eyes from the printed ink, stealing a narrowing glance at Dream who chewed on his bottom lip, brows furrowed as he played with the piano keys.

Misery did love company, George thought as he pushed down his smile which procured itself at the sight of the blonde learning simple chords, *because maybe that's all it took for misery to efface itself, in the act of radical tenderness, the game of survival through kindness.*

And maybe Katherine Mansfield had a point when she said that in spite of everything, tenderness there must be. Tenderness you have known and been deprived of, George no longer heard the piano, stating Dream's pause, *tenderness which you unknowingly crave.*

"You've made progress." George quietly stated, eyes feigning interest in the words he had ditched the moment Dream's fingers left the keys.

"I have?" A faint scratch of Dream's stubble was heard, George smiled to himself as he pictured him looking unconvinced, and half-disgusted at the piano.

"Take a break." George sighed, flipping the pages until he shut the book, sitting up straight on the couch as his lower back pressed itself against the inner armrest. "If you push yourself," He finally looked over; just as presumed, Dream had been watching him. "You're gonna hate it."

Dream turned in his seat, legs settled on either side of the stool. George tried his best to keep his eyes on him, though the sheer imagination he could derive from the image of the blonde's thighs caging something had him clenching his jaw for the lewd thoughts.

"What are you reading?" Dream asked.

"Kafka." George cleared his throat, glancing down at the cover before lightly waving it inches above his head.

You are so lame, why did you do that, idiot? He returned the book onto his lap, avoiding eye contact.

No, why do you care how you present yourself in front of him in the first place? George frowned at

his lap.

“Can I?” Dream’s voice got a lot closer, it was then George realized he’d met him at the couch.

Looking up with slightly widened eyes, he nodded. “It’s your couch.”

“Just like it’s my realm?” Dream asked through a light smirk before taking a seat, leaving a spot for someone between them, despite them being the only ones in the room.

What he had said procured a memory from the first time they properly spoke. The offer of the personal training sessions, all led to *this*. It shouldn’t have felt like ages ago, so why did it?

Why are you suddenly someone completely different from the person I spoke to in that forest?

“Who got you into reading?” Dream asked, readjusting himself so he sat with a leg crossed onto his seat, the other swung over the edge, back pressed against the armrest so he could face George.

“Like...who's your favourite author?”

A curt chuckle puffed past his lips. “Baudelaire.”

What is this small talk bullshit and why am I fine with this? What are we doing?

“Ah, should’ve known,” Dream propped his elbow onto the armrest behind him, George sort of liked this laid-back side of him.

George cocked his head to the side. “Should you have?”

“You annotated the *hell* out of his novel in comparison to the others, Your Majesty.”

George’s nose scrunched before correcting him. “George—”

Dream indolently lifted a defensive hand. “George.”

George shot him a sly look before glancing down at his lap. “Who was...” *Should I dare? You jump-started this conversation so*, He looked over at him, *mouth of honey, may I?* “...who was hers?”

Dream’s smile faded. *Shit*. George’s eyes strung on him. *Fuck. I’m sorry*. Dream looked to the side, shoulders seemingly tensed. *Good fucking going, idiot*—“Um,” He returned his eyes to George, faint smile, voice quiet and soft as he said, “Bukowski.”

An unwarranted smile etched George’s lips as he averted his gaze to the floor.

“Surprised?”

George bit his bottom lip. “I would’ve guessed Hamsun, but...” He lightly shrugged. “...yeah, that makes sense.”

Dream ran his fingers through his hair, taking in a deep breath. “Everyone would always assume Austen or Bron...*Bronte*...” He trailed off, tone unsure as he smiled at George nervously, who momentarily shut his eyes, smile wide as he nodded encouragingly. “Yeah, um,” Dream broke into a low laugh. “I’d see her physically cringe every time—” A soundless giggle sputtered past George’s lips, encouraging Dream’s own, “—it was the worst. I felt for her.”

“They’re not bad, but...” George sighed. “...she definitely doesn’t strike me as that type. Not that I knew her personally or anything, I just—”

“No, it’s...” Dream chimed in. “...it’s fine—you two have...similar tastes. Can’t be too hard to boil it down.”

George nodded, eyes naturally falling back onto his lap before he caught Dream’s stare.

Silence retouched them: they sported gradual, kenning smiles directed at each other, wordlessly transpiring across a “*this is weird, right?*”

Dream was the first to look away, cheeks flushed as always. “Um, what...uh,” He stammered, George hid his grin, “Why this book?”

Looking down at the cover, George thought, *how much weirder can this get?*

And he took a moment before quietly reciting, “The relief of giving in to destruction.”

Dream narrowed his gaze onto him before his brows drew together. George waited on him to catch on and when he did, the memory of how frantically, yet knowingly he had retrieved the books before stacking them into George’s arms—yesterday—had surfaced.

“You’re...” Dream swallowed, shyly looking over. “...you’re probably the only person I know who...isn’t afraid of self-destruction.”

George watched how rapidly both of their smiles had effaced following that silence in which Dream searched for the quote through the memory of him and his mother, through this very room.

Quietly, but not shameful in the slightest, George asked, “S’ that a...bad thing, or...?”

And for a moment he feared he would see the expression of their first time in the Vulcan kitchen, the first time George insinuated that he didn’t *want* to live, let alone exist.

Dream’s smile returned; *kind eyes, mouth of honey*, “It’s the most honest thing in this Kingdom.” His words caused George’s chest to fall with a quiet breath. “We’re...all just in a state of rapid decay, right?”

For a moment, George wondered why those words sounded so familiar until the inked lettering in his copy of Bukowski’s ‘Pulp’ circuited a tiny grin on his lips.

You didn’t read books yourself, Dream chuckled, the colour returning in his cheeks as he averted his gaze to his indolent hand rested in his lap. *But you read them through her.*

A chorus of chatter boomed past the closed doors, belonging to the crowd of Vulcan soldiers.

George looked over his shoulder and glanced back at Dream. “I should head back. My father’s probably wondering where I am.”

Dream nodded, standing from the couch in sync with George. “I’ll walk you out.”

At the door came reluctant goodbyes, almost like neither of them wanted to part. George shook off the feeling, getting ready to keep walking, down the hall, out this palace that somehow grew stuffy the longer he lingered.

“George?” Dream asked, hand firm on the doorknob as they lingered in the archway. “Can we...do this again? Like, hang out?”

It was so easy to say ‘yes’, but a part of him wanted to test things as he always did; dig deeper to find the reason behind wanting to prolong the possibility of this bizarre ‘hang out’.

George leaned his head to the side as he mused. “As friends?”

Just as assumed, just as *hoped*, the term ‘friends’ caused a noticeable shift in Dream’s features as he slowly said, “I don’t know.” *You do know*. “Do you think we could be friends?”

“No.” George easily replied, their eyes locked, he suppressed a smile as he sharply inhaled. “So, we’ll hang out again, yeah?”

Watching Dream’s confusion dissipate to a discerning grin, George turned on his heel, leaving a place he felt close to no attachment unless those *kind eyes and that honeyed tone* were present.



Dream was point-blank *exhausted* at training the next morning. George was the sole thing keeping him awake. He had spent the whole night working his brain around how their conversation ended at the door.

Are you aware of what you’re insinuating when you’re saying ‘no’ to being friends?

“If you lose focus, I’ll lose focus, and then we’re both fucked.” George said as he dropped his hand to his side, Salacia’s freezing temperature showing itself through a gust of mist past his lips.

Because why are you still hanging out with me, if we’re not going to be friends?

“Sor—I mean, yeah. Paying attention.” Dream readied himself, staying behind him. “It’d be cool if you didn’t start bleeding out on me again.”

“Sure, yeah, let me just have a chat with my blood vessels.” George sarcastically replied through a huff.

But *fuck*, how could his overthinking outlive the sheer delight that came from *this*—they’d been spending the last two hours in a constant back and forth, speaking in a way that depicted two friends who’d known each other for years, but not in the same way he was with Sapnap, or how George was with Prince Karl.

Whatever the fuck this was, “What are they saying?”

“Shut up, Dream.”

It shaved an inexplicable amount of weight off his shoulders.

It was less so a surprise than it was an expectancy when the two of them agreed to end training an hour early. This time, on the account of no nosebleeds, just the subtle urge to retrieve to that room.

The thing about the room having always been closed, and the Vulcan warriors not knowing of his and George’s ‘*whatever they were if not friends*’ had Dream frozen in his spot halfway through something George was saying, simply because he spotted three Vulcans coming down the large staircase.

Quickly and unthinkably, Dream wrapped a careful hand around George’s waist, the other around his bicep before ushering them down the hall and past the doors of his mother’s study.

Slamming it shut, one palm flat on the door, the other leaving George’s waist to shield his own eyes, Dream muttered a breathless, “Fuck.”

George, who had been slightly caged against the door burst out laughing. And the pure sound of it

tapped Dream the fuck out. He looked down at him, almost awed at the most contagious, resonating sound to have left George's mouth; eyelids cinched at the corners and grin wide. *Oh, my God.*

"You alright?" George chuckled.

You are so fucking beautiful. "Yeah. Yes, I'm alright. I just..." He backed away, allowing George space when he'd realized how he practically threw the both of them in here. "...they can't know 'cause it'll get to my brother and that idiot will probably tell my father, who'll know I've opened this room, and he's gonna—"

"Relax," George began, tone softening when Dream's lips pressed shut. "Dream."

I can't, not around you. Heart thumping in his chest from the previous getaway to *that fucking laugh, to my name off of your angel-face*, Dream quietly said, "You, um...you want—you just—I don't..." *Fuck.* He let out a nervous chuckle, fingers carding through his fringe. "...know. Sor—"

George shot him a playful glare, Dream pretended to zip his lips; keeping that loving smile on the brunet's lips just as he'd hoped.

"You've still got a composition to ace," George nodded his chin at the piano, pocketing his hands. "And I want to finish that book, so." He began making his way towards the couch.

Dream recollected himself while his eyes followed George; settling himself as he had last evening, knees to his chest, this time, book comfortably in hand.

He joined his space, sitting at the piano where he continued to struggle—glancing from the ivory keys, the prettily hand-written notes, and an even prettier face.



The course of the afternoon was a copy-paste of yesterday evening's and if groundhog day was replaying this, Dream would not mind getting stuck in it for the rest of his life. So when Sapnap's knock sounded through the door for collective training, he was reluctant, to say the least.

"I'll go set up. You're sure you don't wanna stay back?" Sapnap had said, mid-back-walk towards the end of the hall. "I don't mind conducting again."

"Last thing I need is Punz on my back—thanks, though. I'll be out in a sec." Dream assured, watching Sapnap send him finger-guns before he carried on towards the exit of the palace.

When he turned around, George was already getting up from the couch, deriving urgency in Dream's tone when he said, "Stay." Umber irises were on him in a nanosecond, "Please."

George directed his smile at the ground, fidgeting with the ends of the book. Dream revelled at the sight of him; like a small light where darkness used to shadow over his complexion suddenly rejoiced.

"You sure?" George glanced at him through a felled gaze.

Dream nodded, not taking a beat. "I'd actually, um," He inhaled quietly, eyes coursing over the features he grew enamoured with within that hour of silent intakes. "I'd love it if you were still here by the time I get back."

George hadn't answered, didn't tell him he would be, which had Dream expecting a return from a

boisterous training field to a vacant room. Instead, a melancholic melody mellowed past the cracks of those double doors.

Entering as soundlessly as possible, Dream remained in the entrance and almost every nerve in his body was momentarily senseless at the sound created by George's dancing fingers over the keys.

How could you make such a wistful piece sound so graceful? Dream crossed his arms over his chest, leaning his weight into the doorway, admiring *him*. *How are you bringing life to a piano with forlorn sounds?*

The melody came to a slow stop, ringing out as George's fingers gently slid off the keys. "Don't you know it's rude to eavesdrop?" He turned in his seat, reaping a jump in Dream's heart rate.

Dream broke into a small smile, eyes dwelling at the sight of fair skin, complemented in warm lighting. "That was beautiful." His voice had come out quieter than he'd hoped for a statement he wholeheartedly meant.

"Not many people seem to think so."

"Then they must not be listening. Not really."

Not receiving an answer, Dream progressed into the room, arriving at the couch when George mumbled, "Might've made a bit of a mess."

Dream had been too exhausted from training to realize that books strewed the couch and the piano. It was then Dream recounted that he hadn't made the effort to re-slot the books himself, further realizing he preferred it that way since it was the first imprint of life this place had the privilege to witness in ages.

"I like it like this, actually." Dream spoke through a paltry smile, moving a book out of the way before the couch engulfed his tired muscles.

"Rough training?" George asked before joining him on the couch, something Dream didn't digest until after he had naturally turned in his seat to face him.

Naturally. George brought one knee to his chest, the other slung off the edge. *Why is this all second nature to us?* Dream sat as he had the night before. *Was this to be a common occurrence?*

"I was doing three v. ones. I thought I had it easily handled, but." With an arm slung on the headrest of the couch, Dream realized how it was merely a loveseat—his fingers inches away from George's shoulder. "They're getting stronger." He cleared his throat, pulling his arm back slightly.

I don't know what you're comfortable with. "You should rest." *But you hugged me, you didn't mention my hand on your waist when we ran away from the warriors this morning,* "How do you relax?"

Why and how do you just 'do', and not say anything?

"Relax?" Dream asked, mind full, tone empty from being dazed. "Well," He shifted in his seat, bringing his free hand to wrap over his ankle. "Most times, I just hope I'm tired enough to knock out."

"And," George leaned his side into the backrest, head almost resting atop as his eyes washed over Dream's, "If not?"

Dream jutted his bottom lip, briefly looking to the side before offering a shrug. “Lay in bed? Wait till’ sleep consumes me?”

George scoffed lightly, a lazy smile growing on his lips. “Yes, but that’s sleep—how do you...unwind?”

Unwind? “I...don’t?” He almost chuckled until he realized George had been awaiting an answer he *should* have had.

George furrowed his eyebrows. “That’s...concerning.”

“Well, I mean,” Dream straightened up slightly. “Isn’t that how it goes? You...wake up, eat, train for hours, shower, then sleep. I don’t really see...where unwinding fits.”

“It should,” George quietly said, eyes flitting across his features: *is that worry? Concern? Care?* “You weren’t...just doing that when you were doing those hundred hours, were you?”

Dream blinked, knowing for a fact his answer was to shock. “I was tired enough as I said.”

“I don’t think you were tired, Dream.” *Care. That’s what his name sounded through.* “You were burnt out, and...probably too young to know.”

There was something within him that didn’t have an answer to the cadence used to imply something that sounded factual, but a taught instinct fought to reject.

So in not knowing how to respond or react, Dream forced a smile and jerked his chin at him. “And how do *you* unwind, Your *Majesty*?”

“Call me that again and I *will* leave.” George pointed an indolent, but warning finger at him.

Dream’s chuckle dwelled down. “I’m glad you didn’t, by the way.”

The corner of George’s lips gradually fell before they jerked back up, causing him to glance to the side in avoidance. “To answer your question, I read.”

Dream leaned his head to where George had looked, searching for his eyes as he said, “And how is reading misanthropes helping you unwind?”

George scoffed a clipped laugh. “It’s cathartic.” He finally caught his stare, the two of them momentarily relaxed in their shared gaze. “Surely you must’ve read something in your life that has had that impact on you.”

Dream chuckled. “No, actually, most of the classics I read were...through my mom. Through quotes, at that.”

George leaned back into his seat, Dream didn’t fail to notice that he’d gotten a few inches closer than before. “Quotes?”

Dream found himself falling into the approach. “Yeah, she had a notebook filled with her favourite lines.” His smile grew in tandem with his; too focused on the beauty of George’s countenance, Dream had forgotten to pull his arm back, but he realized when George’s shoulder was flush against his wrist, the leg they each had seated on the couch almost touching. “I, um,” He giggled, shaking his head. “Sapnap—Nick,” George nodded at the correction. “He and I would only read books on Greek gods.”

George rolled his eyes. “Let me guess,” He slicked his lips, tilting his chin. “You assigned a Greek god to each other.”

Dream’s head lightly lolled to the side with a breathless laugh. “...Yeah.” He reluctantly admitted as he looked at George through a squint.

“Go on,” George dwindled his hand at him. “Let’s hear it.”

“Fuck.” Dream whispered, covering his eyes with his hand, earning a small chuckle from George. “You—you *have* to keep in mind that we were both extremely young and—”

“Dream,” George beckoned softly, ceasing the words from his tongue. “I’m pretty positive everyone else played this game. Don’t stress.”

“Did *you*?” Gaining an evasive smile and a diverting gaze, Dream leaned in with a small gasp. “You did—”

“*No*. My friends did—”

“Okay, so what were they?”

George’s brows knitted as he shrugged. “Why do you care?”

“Because.” Dream shrugged as well, daring to lean his arm into George’s shoulder. “Your friends are a reflection of you.”

George reclined into his touch. “And you’re so keen on knowing me, aren’t you?”

Dream half-smiled, merely glancing around the room before saying, “I let *you* in, didn’t I?”

The edge of George’s lips tugged up before he abided. “Well, there’s three of them, so—”

“Let’s start with your anchor.” Dream pressed his side into the couch, feeling a wave of relaxation course over him; there was something about George’s tone that simply lulled him to sleep.

“Karl?” A tight-lipped smile reached his cheekbones. “Helios.”

Dream offered a small nod. “Why’s that?”

George shifted in his seat, bringing his other knee to his chest; there was a way in which they naturally adjusted their positions to make the other comfortable that Dream did not dismiss.

“He’s like...a ball of sunshine.” George’s smile widened with the spoken syllables, “Plus, I think he’d look pretty good riding a chariot with horses.”

Do you like him, like that? Dream wanted to ask, but he couldn’t bring himself to.

“And...Princess of Eurys?”

“Niki—oh, Iris. Without a doubt.” George broke into a small grin. “The peacemaker, voice of an angel.”

Dream quirked an eyebrow. “She can sing?”

“God, no.” Dream giggled softly at the quick disgust. “She’s just...soft-spoken. She’ll say things sometimes and her voice...it’s like heaven on earth, as dramatic as it sounds.”

As he spoke about his friends, Dream couldn't help but notice the sheer difference from them to George, but more so, how easy words came to him, how a smile matched every word he associated with his friends.

"And your, uh...your guard? Alex?"

"I'd never actually..." George chuckled softly, eyes cast to his lap as he slid down in his seat for comfort. "...tell him this, it would get to his head, but...Achilles."

"Oh, yeah?"

George drew in his bottom lip, slowly nodding. "Great warrior, loyal, would die a hero in battle, but also...has a heart of gold." He meekly flailed his hands over his lap. "There's your background research. Your turn."

Dream slackened in his seat. "Nick was Hermes..." Watching George break into a grin, Dream squeezed his eyes shut, slightly hanging his head. "...don't make me—"

"You were Apollo, weren't you?"

There was a beat of silence until the both of them broke into a small laugh.

"To be fair, I think the only reason we chose that is because of Hermes' and Apollo's bond. Nothing to do with the specifics." Dream waved it off, cheeks surely flushed in embarrassment.

"Good, 'cause I don't think Apollo suits you."

Have you thought about me enough to know what would?

"No?" Dream asked, earning a small shake of his head. "And what would you say?"

George lightly pursed his lips, dark eyes waving over Dream's countenance. "Orpheus."

"I...surprisingly can't remember what he did."

"He could charm people with the instruments he played. You're not alike in that sense 'cause you're rather shit at the piano," A laugh jerked past Dream's lips, causing a weightless grin to appear on George's own. "But," He lowered a faltering gaze as he said, "Charming, nonetheless."

A sudden gush of warmth engulfed Dream's chest as he wordlessly stared back.

"And just as he'd do anything for Eurydice, you'd do...just about anything for the ones you love." He easily stated, yet every word was augmenting the warmth coursing through him. "Right?"

Dream recalled their talk in the pub, his discourse on being a warrior and going to battle because he would kill for the people he loved—and *George remembered that*. "From my knowledge of Greek gods, I feel like I should have one for you, but...nothing's coming to mind. What do your friends say?"

"Dionysus." George wrapped his arms around his legs. "I don't see it, but I suppose my opinion doesn't matter in this case." He rested his chin on his knee before settling his gaze onto him. "You mean something different to each person."

And though Dream couldn't remember the last time he'd pick up a book, let alone on Greek gods, he was going to make it his mission to find the matching one for George.

He must've yawned, or his eyes must've come to a close, Dream wasn't sure, but George's voice almost echoed in his head when he stated, "I'm gonna head back—"

"Don't, please." Dream was going to blame this forwardness on sleep deprivation, he couldn't allow himself to accept any other reason. "You...you mentioned this thing...about unwinding. I didn't know what it was..." He slicked his lips, looking at George through heavy eyelids. "...until now. Talking to you..." *Fuck it.* "...helps." His head found its way against his own bicep as he readjusted himself to rest comfortably on the couch.

George was looking at him, or he wasn't, it was hard to tell.

"Stay." Dream asked, for the second time that day.

And for the second time that day, George stayed.

There was shuffling accompanied by ruffling pages. Forcing his eyes open, Dream looked at him; George hadn't moved much, just reclined in his seat with a book in his hand.

Growing the courage as sleep continued to swallow him whole, Dream thought he could dare himself to ask one more thing. "George?"

His dark brown eyes peaked above the book, meeting Dream.

"What are you doing...tomorrow night?"

"I don't think that far ahead, Dream."

Hushed tones, quiet room, *otium*—everything was so quiet in his mind.

"It's Vulcanalia." Eyes fluttering shut, "My birthday also, but." Dream continued through a tired whisper, "Will you come?"

Say yes. Clothes shuffled against the couch. Please. A page turned. He comes back tomorrow and it's going to get loud again. George cleared his throat. *You make it all so fucking quiet.*

"Sure," George whispered back, purposefully, almost.

Letting out a small breath of relief, Dream said, "Thank you."

George chuckled softly. "For what, Dream?"

"Dream. Dream. Dream."

And sleep locked him in the echo of his name, adjusted to the cadence belonging to the angel-face so close within his reach.



Maybe the reason George stalled till the very last minute before entering Vulcan for the third time this week was when that switch occurred ever since the first step he'd taken in that room.

Or when Dream's hand on his waist, despite how hasty and uncalculated it had been, had actually made him *feel* something.

Or when he caught himself looking at Dream just as many times as Dream looked at him on the couch adjacent to the piano.

Or when they fit perfectly on that couch and conversation came easy.

Or when smiles, giggles, and rosy cheeks weren't one-sided.

Or when he woke up and couldn't take his eyes off how peaceful Dream looked because he decided to *stay*.

"Stay."

How *could* George leave? *Sad eyes, mouth of honey, kind smile, and tired, lonely soul, how could I?*

Quackity asked, so did Karl, Niki just smiled knowingly. But they were all wondering why their friend, who used to hide away for hours in his room, was reading books elsewhere, in the company of someone other than himself.

So maybe George hesitated before going to Vulcanalia. Maybe he waited until he was sure the festival was nearing its end.

And it had. George walked past the entrance, remnants of what was a lively festival showcased themselves on the messy floor, tables busied with used cutlery and plates, not a single attendee in sight, aside from the performers that were beginning their packing process.

And him. George stopped at the entrance. Dream was wearing a maroon suit, fitted to his build; broad shoulders, fabric sleek and tight around his arms and thighs, legs that George found himself thinking about which was followed by a lot of mental scoldings for letting his mind go there in the first place.

Charming. Dream was in conversation with one of the performers, deriving laughs from them and flushed complexions. *Where is this when you're talking to me? Do you not dare?*

"You look nice," George called, halting Dream's movements in an instant.

The performer looked over at George before Dream did. Turning around, surprise etched in his features, Dream stared back as George walked towards him, heels of his boots echoing through the nearly vacant room. *And that black undershirt that comely hugged your torso.*

"Hey." Dream finally said, breaking into a smile, accompanied by familiar rosy cheeks.

"Hi," George reached him, keeping his hands tight in his pockets as he felt *oddly nervous*.

"Apologies for being late."

"S'okay," Dream chuckled nervously, carding his fingers through his hair, which looked tousled and wayward from the festival. "I'm glad you came."

George bowed his head. "Empty-handed, though, I'm afraid."

A look rose in Dream's face, one that had spun George's thought process on its axis as he detected the playfulness he had a hint of in intervals of past conversations. "It's actually...sort of mandatory for you to bring presents."

The corner of George's lips cracked into an upswing. "Excuse me?"

"And since you upped and left this morning before I *woke up*," Dream smirked, tilting his chin up. *He wasn't drunk, but he had to have had one drink*—George remembered that very smile in his

dimly-lit bedroom that one night. “I figure you actually kind of owe me one.”

“I didn’t think you’d care.” George scoffed. “You left mine unannounced, once.”

“Guess we both thought we didn’t care when we actually did.”

It had rolled off Dream’s tongue so fluidly that it shouldn’t have knocked a smug look off both of their faces, but it had been replaced with knowing smiles that they both looked away from.

Dream tended his hand, George’s attention was directed to it before he looked up at him with a scoff. “I am *not* dancing with you.”

Dream cocked his head to the side. “You owe me a birthday present, George.” Before George could reiterate his response, Dream waved for the performer’s attention, “Hey, guys?”

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” George asked under his breath.

“Helping you with my birthday present—you’re welcome—” Dream quickly mumbled to him before returning his attention to the singer. “—can you play that last song again?”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

The request was processed and on the brink of being followed and George was still keeping his hand to himself. “I’m not doing this—”

“Why are you here, George?” Dream cut him off, through confidence that should’ve pushed George away, should’ve made him turn around. “You knew the festival would be over by the time you got here,” George rolled his eyes, a bitter smile dancing on his lips as he avoided a discerning pair of green eyes. “So, why did you still come?”

Because you asked me the way you did. Because you sounded like you didn’t want to be alone. Because we could both use each other’s company, even though we won’t openly admit it. Because despite everything else that should’ve kept me away from your realm, I stayed last night and I’m staying now—for reasons I cannot explain.

Because of you—to see you. “To make sure this was a mistake, thanks for the confirmation.” George forcefully slipped his hand in Dream’s, welcoming the warmth against his innate cold, revelling in the near burn he could almost feel off of his hand.

In saying something so contradicting to his actions, George hoped a shred of his strung thoughts came across. And when he heard Dream laugh, one that was a lot more audible than all the previous ones, one that George had never heard, but hoped to hear again, he knew they were in agreement.

A piano interceding with a violin sounded through a melody, one that kissed George’s ears and eased the tension around them.

Dream smiled down at him winningly, George purposely stepped closer to rest his head against his chest—careful to tilt it just slightly for the space of his crown.

He *needed* to evade eye contact as well as the clear blush in his cheek that gave away his feelings towards *that goddamn hand on his waist*, George’s eyelids fluttered shut, his fingers instinctively closing in over Dream’s hand. *As much as he hated the proposition, this felt...nice.*

Dream’s hand slid over his back, one arm delicately wrapped around George’s waist. George fell

into the touch almost so instinctively that it nearly scared him, causing his hand to slide from Dream's bicep so he could wrap his arm around his shoulders.

Nervousness—which he didn't know he was capable of feeling around Dream—inundated every fibre in his body.

And through every progressing touch from that moment on, the singer's voice diluted into a blur, the song sounding as if it were being played next door.

Because although George had hugged him, Dream had never hugged back. And this feeling, being half caged in his arms, his hand holding his—had George's mind going haywire.

And he was losing it with every twitch in Dream's hand on the small of his back. *And he fucking loved it.* George loved it because he was finally feeling *something*—not the feelings he had tried to avoid in the past. *No, this touch*—this touch burnt him, but in a way that had him wanting *more*.

Dream swayed them, George mindlessly worked with him, and it wasn't until he dipped his lips down to speak to him that George was pulled from his thoughts. "Can I be honest?" George only nodded, Dream must've felt it. "I thought you weren't gonna show."

George's shoulders fell with a small breath, eyelids still closed as he allowed unthinkable words to course past his lips. "I told you I would."

"Not seeing you there this morning had me thinking otherwise." *Your heart's beating fast*, George found himself leaning his temple onto his shoulder, causing Dream to gently rest his head atop his.

And in apologizing for something he never thought he would, George whispered, "I'm sorry." Furthering his alienation from himself, he unclasped their hands before interlocking their fingers, opening his eyes to watch the way they interlaced with ease.

Dream's swaying had momentarily stopped at the gesture until it returned, much slower. "You know how...we were talking about Greek gods last night?" Earning a small hum from George, he continued. "I found out which one you are, to me."

To me. "Go on." George's voice was so quiet, he was almost going to repeat what he said until Dream spoke.

"Atlas."

From his knowledge of the grandiose behind the name, for what the figure had done in history, George's heart skipped a beat. *Because*—knowing where the premise would lead Dream's next statement, George realized—it was a punishment for Atlas.

"For what he did, for others." Dream continued, and if George wasn't too busy meddling with his own thoughts, he would have noticed the way Dream gave a gentle tug at his waist, bringing their hips flushed against each other. "That's why you stay, isn't it?"

If you consider yourself 'others', are you considering yourself a burden to me?

"You're not a burden, Dream." George felt Dream's head weighing in on his shoulder, their fingers went momentarily loose in their grasp.

"I know," Dream hushed. "You still just take the weight off my shoulders, sometimes." His breath was warm against his neck, "You make it quiet." George unfastened their interlocked fingers so he could wrap both his arms around Dream's shoulders. "Thank you, George." He mumbled against

his hair before wrapping his free arm around George's waist, *finally hugging back, finally taking, as you should have been.*

Why are you thanking me for caring?

Care which you deserve. George tightened his arms around him as strings of composed texts came flooding with the darling dark head on his shoulder. *Who with a heart in breast could ever deny you of love in the first place?*

Mouth of honey, Dream's fingers dug on either side of his waist, George couldn't stop the hand he brought to the back of Dream's head, *how could your father deny you?*

He's made you this way, Dream tucked his face into the crook of George's neck, arms tightening around his waist. *Put your head on my heart.* George carded his fingers through blonde strands, feeling the tip of Dream's nose against his skin. *I won't deny you.*

His heart overflowed with a nurturing feeling he didn't know he *still* possessed, let alone for a near stranger who felt oddly familiar.

And his words remained caged as they always were, locked in his actions working in tandem with Dream's soul-shattering embrace.

I should be thanking you, Dream—George knew Dream wouldn't have felt this, so he purposefully ghosted his lips instead of pressing them onto his shoulder, where he placed an imperceptible kiss —*for making me feel again.*

Chapter End Notes

oof. apologies for the delay. thank you for the nice, of course.
stay good, and well. till' next update x (:

Echoes of Silence

Chapter Summary

George returns to his old ways following some news, and as he falls into darkness, Dream is the only person he wants by his side.

Chapter Notes

TW sebastian gets *sort of* physical with met!dream in this one. reason i'm saying 'sort of' is cos it's very brief, but feel free to skip that part nonetheless. it's just sebastian giving him shit, what's new.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



Whenever he was around George, Dream felt like he was floating up in space.

Weightless, refined arms dressed in satin white fabric wrapped tightly around his shoulders, *free*, tender neck of sweet mint, *untethered*, dainty fingers caressing his hair.

From having heard this song once, Dream knew it was nearing its end. But he didn't let go. *Not until you do*. George was fully leaned into him, craning his neck to allow more space for Dream's head to rest. *This feels too good to let go of*.

The violin strings sang their last chord alongside the piano's, ringing in a near echo through the Vulcan ballroom.

George didn't let go. Dream withdrew one hand from his waist and slid it up to his back as if he was holding the most fragile thing on this earth. *How are you this kind to me?* George's fingers slowed in his hair. *You didn't say anything following my 'thank you'.*

George turned his head where it laid on his shoulder, Dream only slightly lifted his own from George's. *Still not accepting my gratitude, like you didn't want to be thanked for it.*

"Clay."

Like splintering glass in their safe-haven, Dream looked up from George's shoulder, meeting eyes with his father; heart aflame with the loss of George's hold.

"I need to speak with you."

They both dropped an arm from the other; one calloused hand remained on George's waist, one soft palm lingered on Dream's chest.

"I'll be with you in a minute, sir—"

“Now.” Sebastian cut him off.

“It’s okay.” George’s voice eased in.

It barely effaced the glare Dream set on his father as he slowly returned his gaze to George only to find him stealing a glance at Sebastian.

George looked up at him, sporting a half-smile, brushing a hand from Dream’s chest to his arm where he gave it a soothing squeeze. “Happy Birthday, Dream.” Said in the same string of words which he heard from Sapnap and the Vulcan warriors at breakfast that morning, yet incomparable.

And when George left him in the company of Sebastian, Dream clung onto the way those words were spoken and the ghosting touch that remained around his bicep, because it was the only thing that would help him through whatever talk he was to have with his father in the following minutes.

“Your brother says he’s seen you do some questionable things in my absence,” Was what Sebastian first said to him when they entered his study.

Dream wasn’t surprised that this was only the third sentence his father had said to him since his return, none of which held a mention of his birthday.

“And you know,” There was that deceptively calm tone he’d use right before turning Dream into a wreck. “For a second, I didn’t believe him. How stupid of me, huh?”

Dream’s heart pounded in his chest, he stood frozen in his spot as he unwillingly stared back. Sebastian was half-sat on his desk, hands clasped in between his parted legs as he veered his glare from the ground to him; almost like the ground was as unappealing to him as his son.

“Because I see you dancing with the same man you brought past those doors—ones I specifically told *you*, of all people, to keep shut,” Sebastian spoke through gritted teeth.

Maybe it was the look on his face that tantalized Dream, propelling his thought: *deny*.

“I don’t know what Luke told you, but—”

Sebastian shoved a finger in his direction. “Don’t you *dare* lie to me right now.”

Dream’s lips slapped shut with a sharp breath.

Sebastian’s jaw shifted, soured tongue with the words on the tip of it. “I saw the two of you on her couch this morning.”

Fuck.

“It was getting late, we were tired from training, and—”

“What training, exactly? The one you skipped and left your *guard* in charge of?” Sebastian rose from his seat, Dream had the instinct to step back. “The training I asked you to take care of, as my next in line—”

“It was *one* practice—”

“*Shut* your mouth.” Sebastian was inches away from him before Dream could collect his breath. “I know very well you’re not talking back to me considering your fuck ups.” Dream’s hands clenched themselves where he kept them tucked behind him. “How are you going to *beg* me to push back the battle against The Nether for your friend when you’re not even doing anything to help him?”

“I *am* helping him—”

“What did I just say?” Sebastian rose his voice, clipping the words off of Dream’s tongue. “Go against my orders and speak over me *one* more time and I will hang you by your *fucking neck*.” Dream’s breath hitched as his father harshly gripped his neck. “You’re walking a fine line, Clay.” *He thinks he can barely breathe*, either from the words or the tightening grip. “Get out.” A breath punched past his lips through a ragged course when the grip is released. “*Leave*.”

Dream did. With tears he was unable to hold back and a birthday present in the form of his father’s threat, Dream left.



A part of George worried, after having left that ballroom and after seeing that look on Dream’s face when his father demanded his attention. *Your look says otherwise and yet you succumb*.

“Did you end up making it to the festival?” Cole greeted him when he walked into the foyer.

“Huh?” George looked up from the ground, almost startled. “Sort of, yeah.” He walked into the tended arm, earning a kiss on his temple from his father; the familiar aroma of wine filled his nostrils as he pulled away to glance at the wine glass. “Fuck’s sake, how fucking old is this one? Or *young*—”

“Son,” Cole huffed, half-annoyed. “*Must* you use profanity with every other word?”

“Must *you* have to drink the shittiest wine?” That gained him another look, which derived a laugh from George as he carelessly continued, “I mean has this even had the time to ferment?” He tried to reach for it, but Cole pulled it away.

“Yes, and I guess you’ll have to take my word for it.” Cole looked at him through a warning glare, one George averted his eyes from. “You’ve been good, right? I don’t need to take breath samples?”

George scoffed a bitter laugh before asking, “You off to sleep?”

“You know what they say,” Cole motioned for his son to ascend the staircase first, George walked up with him. “Glass of wine before bed does the trick.”

“You are *so* old.” Receiving a sharp jab of Cole’s elbow in his arm, George chuckled. “Drink a wine your age, pal.”

“Ugh.” Cole grudgingly threw his head back as they reached their floor. “You sound like Alex. And bring this up with Felicity, she’s the one who dropped it off.”

A light gasp escaped past his lips, “I’m so disappointed in her, I just might.” George laid a fair squeeze on his father’s shoulder. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

George heard murmurs from down the large hallway after Cole disappeared into his room. What he hadn’t expected to hear was Karl’s, Quackity’s, and Niki’s voice discussing exactly what he feared they would if he wasn’t involved in a conversation that lacked laughter and banter, ones he’d usually walk in without taking a beat. So he remained at the ajar door, listening in.

“Guys, stop. I feel so bad,” Niki sounded like she was speaking through tears.

“For who?” *Karl*.

“For *George*. Who else?”

“He wouldn’t understand, Niki.” *Quackity*. “He told me not to do it, so he can’t know.”

Not to do what?

“He has a good point, though. That phone call could’ve meant so many things, I’m not a hundred percent sure—”

“That’s precisely *why* I want to get my hands on the battle plan against The Mind.”

George’s hand flew to the doorknob, but he refrained himself. *They left you out for a reason, this is your chance to hear all of it—things they won’t tell you if you open that door.*

“So, what, we think...King Sebastian made up that shit about The Nether just so he could con Salacia to fight by their side—Alex, this is starting to sound so far fetched—”

“It’s not, Karl. Niki’s right...this *could* mean so many things. This could mean...” A pause, a bed creak. “...if he’s malicious enough to use Anthea’s death to his advantage, what else is—or *was* he capable of?”

Mother’s death to his advantage?

“Fuck, Q, what are you trying to say?”

“What if *he* knows what actually happened to her? ‘Cause he stayed behind—”

“Okay, no. We’re not...” Karl laughed, *nervously*. “...I can kind of agree with King Sebastian not being someone we can trust, and yeah, maybe The Nether *possibly* had nothing to do with Anthea’s death, but don’t go...don’t go looking deeper than that. You’re gonna cause unnecessary drama.”

“I *need* to get my hands on that plan—”

“Quackity, please.” Niki huffed, *she sounds so distraught*. “I don’t want you to do anything yet, okay? Please.”

An exasperated sigh, *Quackity’s*.

The murmurs continued, but George backed away, nearly stumbling in his step from the abundance of altering emotions following that conversation he was not supposed to hear. He made a bee-line for his room, closing the door as quietly as possible before taking a slow seat at the edge of his bed.

Fucking Sebastian. He shook his head in disbelief. *That letter couldn’t have been forged, could it? Wouldn’t he have noticed? Wouldn’t father have known?* He ran a hand through his hair, elbows digging onto his knees. *Why would Sebastian use mother’s passing to his advantage?* He fisted the fabric of his slacks, leaning back with a sharp inhale. *Why did I accept this if not to truly avenge mother? Why did I incite a war?*

“Holy fuck.” George surged up from his seat as he began pacing.

Did you know? George stopped dead in his tracks. *Dream*. His eyes went wide at his floorboards. *Did he force you into not telling me?*

And you listened. George’s hand flew to his mouth. *Is that why you wanted to help so bad?*

Niki's not a hundred percent sure. George took a breath, dropping his hand to his side. *But what if she was sure?*

You know who isn't sure? "Fuck," George whispered defeatedly, walking towards his bookshelf, no longer in charge of his own actions. *You.*

Because you weren't there. He reached up, pulled a book out, *you'd have a fucking clue what to think right now if you were there,* he tossed it onto the lounge chaise, reaching for the neck of the glass bottle, *but you weren't there.*

The cork came out the rim with a 'pop'. He glanced into the depths of the brown liquid. *You thought you had it under control, you thought you could be a king,* he lifted the rim to his lips, ragged breaths fogging the neck of it, *you thought for a second you could do right by her,* he tipped the bottle back with his head, welcoming the familiar taste with an opened throat and closing heart, *you are nothing but hopeless.*

And in having no hope, for himself or for others, George drained the contents of the bottle like water from a basin at the end of a desert. *You never came back from this,* the mirror above the fireplace stared back at him, tear-stained cheeks and lips dripped in alcoholic guilt, *you were always this person and you always be,* he tipped the bottle back again, draining every last drop. *Going back seemed too far of a journey anyway.*

You tried learning the lifestyle you weren't accustomed to, George grabbed the bottle by its neck, staring emptily at the hearth of the fireplace, *stick to what you know to save yourself the shame.*

And what he knew was this—escapism through liquor. And his demon, sporting a 'welcome home' sign slung around his neck with his arms wide open.

And George fell into his embrace. Tumbling down the familiar darkness, George crashed.



Dream showed up at Salacia's doorstep the following morning. The cold sheathing him upon entrance worsened the headache at his temple from the restless night he had.

Two things worked his brain into a bottomless pit of distraught: the fact that he'd clearly grown dependent on George following last night's events. The other thing being his father, point-blank.

The door swung open and he was met with the last face he expected to see.

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

Alex. Or as George called him, Quackity—for whatever dumb reason. Dream found himself mildly irritated and maybe it was the pounding headache, but he had a feeling it was also because of the rude greeting. *Maybe Sapnap had a point when he blindly hated this idiot.*

"Morning to you too, Alex." Dream bowed his head, reluctantly. "I came to see George. We have training in...thirty-five minutes ago."

"Do you see him anywhere?" Quackity cocked an eyebrow.

Dream blinked at him before forcing a tight-lipped smile. "Well, you *are* blocking the door, so."

Quackity returned the gesture, tilting his chin to properly look at him. Dream relished in their height difference, which automatically gave him the upper hand.

“You ever consider that if he hasn’t shown in the last *forty fucking* minutes that he probably won’t show at all?”

“Thirty-five.” Dream corrected.

Quackity stared blankly. “What—”

“It’s been thirty-five minutes—”

“Go home, Prince Clay.” Dream landed a firm hand onto the door as it began closing in on him. “Jesus Christ—”

“He’s shown up to every training session. Is something wrong? Is he...sick or something?”

Quackity wavered his gaze onto him, an expression rose that overtook the clear irritation he previously possessed. He could almost hear the ‘why do you care’ through his furrowed features.

“I don’t know,” Quackity shrugged, averting his eyes. “He didn’t show up for collective breakfast and his door is locked.”

A silence held two people in pure perplexion at the spoken statement: Dream didn’t know George *that* well, but it was the way in which Quackity, who clearly knew him a lot better, was just as lost.

“Can I see him?” Dream found himself asking through a mumbled tone like he knew he would get rejected.

Just as presumed, Quackity took a step forward. “While you’re here, let me set something straight.” He scoffed bitterly, shaking his head. “I know you’re getting well *acquainted* with George, so we both know he comes off as this massively emotionally distant asshole.” He tipped his chin up, breaking the personal space between them. “But he’s also really fucking naive when it comes to the people he likes. And for *whatever fucking* reason, he likes you.” Dream’s heart dropped, as did his defensive glare. “But I don’t. And I think we both know why.”

There were so many things provoking contradicting emotions that Dream found himself staring back absolutely dumbfounded at the sudden call-out.

“If I hear that your father had anything to do with Anthea’s death, you’re *done* for,” Quackity spoke through gritted teeth. “Got it?”

Completely lost from the course of delivered accusations, Dream breathlessly asked, “*What?*”

“George isn’t training today. Go back to your realm,” Quackity stepped back, hand firm on the doorknob as he gave it a push, his spiteful, “*Your Highness.*” being the last thing heard before the door returned between them.

Then it struck him. *But there’s no way.* Did Quackity know about the forged letter? And if he did, something must’ve gotten lost in translation because why did he think Sebastian had anything to do with Anthea’s death?

Dream hoped to return to Vulcan with George in tow, instead, he came back with the third reason behind his raging headache. The only person he wanted to talk to had shut himself in his room.

And Dream wondered: *if she and you are alike, have you done what I think you have?*



Collective breakfast, was George's first thought when he heard knocks at his purposefully locked bedroom door. And at the moment his schedule as a king rose with regrets, his hands were quick on the liquor he'd kept in the deep of his closet drawers.

"What...the fuck?" George grumbled at an empty bottle that *should* have been full but wasn't because his drunk self found its way to it when the Cognac didn't suffice.

But he wasn't worried because, George got up from the floor, dragged over a stepping stool and launched boxes off the top shelf before revealing two bottles of wine, *as an addict, he always had a plan B*.

The first and last time George looked at the time that day was to figure out when Karl would return to Terra. *Not for another hour*, he noted.

So, he popped open the bottle of wine, setting the unopened one onto the piano's music shelf. And he drank, he played and plotted—how he was gonna pretend to be sober enough to steal from Karl's supplies once he got to the atelier.

His favourite part of being high was that the *only* thing he had to worry about, was how he was gonna get his next high, how he was to avoid sobriety like the plague.

And George *refused* to worry about anything else but that.



George was thankful he didn't drink the second bottle of wine because he was already having a hard time acting sober when Karl swung open the door to the atelier.

Small talk was *painful* and he had to pretend like he knew what Karl was talking about when apparently Cole had checked in on him; and *apparently*, he told his father he was just 'feeling ill'.

Regardless, Karl didn't seem to suspect anything. George was positive it was because he, too, seemed skittish. George was also positive it was because of the conversation he eavesdropped on, *but he wasn't trying to think about that right now*.

But since the universe was never on his side, George watched Karl fidget with his rings and years of friendship foreshadowed the words on the tip of his tongue. "George—"

"I know." George cut him off, receiving his wide eyes in an instant. "I wasn't supposed to hear it, but I did."

"George, fuck, I'm sorry—"

"Why doesn't Niki trust me?" George asked, voice coming out through a broken whisper.

Maybe it was lack of dehydration, or the sobriety that crept up on him the longer this conversation prolonged, despite having only just begun.

Karl leaned his head to the side with a sigh. "She *does* trust you, she just doesn't know how to tell you."

"Yet she told you and Quackity." George pressed.

Karl sighed, fully turning in his spot on the couch to face George. "Okay, listen," He puffed,

interlocking his fingers. “I think...the main reason she didn’t tell you is that recently, you’ve been spending a *lot* of time with Prince Clay.”

George’s features scrunched. “*And?*”

“*And,*” Karl playfully rolled his eyes at George’s quick defence. “We didn’t tell you because we didn’t want it to get in between the two of you.” *Dream and I?* “Especially not over something that Niki isn’t a hundred percent sure about, you know?”

“I doubt Quackity is part of this ‘we’ you’re talking about.” George shot him a look, earning a small laugh.

“Yeah, but I didn’t think that needed to be mentioned.” Karl winked at him, causing an unstoppable smile to stitch George’s lips. “Niki and I...we think it’s, like, probably the first time we’ve seen you remotely...” His lips churned as he looked for the word before offering a careless shrug, “...*alive...* again.”

Darling dark head, George quickly looked away from Karl as a certain pair of green eyes accompanied by that stupid kind smile surfaced in his mind, *you make me feel again.*

“And as for Quackity...” Karl drew in his bottom lip, hesitant when he caught George’s eyes. “...I know you’re trying to protect him, the way you always have, but I think he has a point, George.”

George’s expression fell. “Fucking hell, you can’t be serious—”

“No, no. Listen to me,” Karl inhaled deeply. “You’ve always been this way. Your heart is too big for this world, handsome. And as much as I *love* you for it, this situation doesn’t allow that.” A crushed sigh escaped him when he lost George’s attention. “This is a war-driven kingdom. Sometimes we have to do these things because there are people that we’re not sure we can trust. It’s just how it works.”

And you wouldn’t know that because you’ve been hiding away in your room, losing yourself in sex, drugs, and alcohol. George was already missing the remnants of liquor that laid thick on his tongue.

“If it makes you feel any better, Quackity isn’t gonna go through with it. He respects you too much.” Karl’s voice weaved through his thoughts. “We were only theorizing and knew that it would drive you insane, so we...we...excluded you.”

George didn’t take it to heart this time, not when he’s known these three morons for longer than he felt like he knew himself.

“Karl,” George murmured, earning a hum from him. “Do you think...” He slicked his lips. “...do you think I’m making a mistake? By trusting him?”

Karl’s brows knitted. “...Who?”

Dream. “Prince...Clay.”

“I don’t think so? It’s his father we don’t really trust right now.”

“But what if he turns out like him because...” George shook his head, *he forced you into not telling me and you listened,* “...maybe he’ll always be under his control, never denying him...” *even if he denies you, all the time,* “...following all his orders.”

Karl pursed his lips, glancing at the side. “You told me you’ve been spending time with him and that...he’s different than who you thought him to be, right?” George slowly nodded. “He doesn’t really sound anything like his father.”

The tears at the mention of your mother. The small laughs and giggles. The memorization of book placements. The patience and kindness of your entire being, mouth of honey—“Not even close.” George found himself saying.

When he looked over at Karl following his silence, he caught his smile, one that reached his eyes. “And you know,” He leaned forward, looking up into George’s eyes. “Even if he does know about his father’s plan, *if* one even exists—I don’t think he’s willingly keeping it away from you.” Earning growing confusion on George’s face, Karl continued, “I think he’s just scared to tell you. Just like how Niki was scared to tell us. You said it yourself, they’re being controlled.” George’s gaze drew to the ground. “Kinda weird, huh? The people in that phone call we’re theorizing about being the two most controlling parents in the hierarchy.”

“I don’t get it...I’ve never given him a reason not to trust me.”

“I think he’s just scared of losing you.” His gaze flew up to meet Karl’s. “He needs to know that if and when he talks about his father—no matter how harsh the truth might be—it’s not gonna scare you off.”

George narrowed his stare onto him, Karl timidly smiled back. “Are we sure it’s me that’s been spending a lot of time with him or—” Laughter bubbled past Karl’s lips. “—how do *you* know all these things?”

“When you think about it, Prince Clay and Niki have a lot in common.” Karl leaned back in his seat with a smug look. “And I’d say I know her pretty well.”

George should have been okay after this. He should have felt relieved, should have felt disgusted for relapsing. Instead, George looked at his best friend and all he could think about was the high he badly craved and how it lied behind the cupboards just a couple of feet away from where they sat.

Because once he got a taste of mental evasion, his demon wasn’t letting him go. And a big part of George held his hand just as tight.

“Are you cold?” Karl’s concern should have made George feel bad for pretending like he was, just to get him out of the room.

And when Karl left to grab him a sweater, George was quick to the cabinets that held his cravings. Fishing out as much as he could, grabbing the precise crushed minerals that he’s grown accustomed to seeing in the past. And upon hearing his footsteps approach, George quickly pocketed all of the fetched items, walking towards the door.

“Hey, where are you going?”

Fuck.

“Huh?” George turned around, faking a cough. “I think I’m still feeling a little sick? Yeah, those shivers might be a fever—”

“Oh, I can make you some—”

“I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?”

George barely had time to catch Karl's last words before he was out of the door, clutching tightly onto what every fibre in his body screamed for.

George crashed and woke to see another day, one where he conned his best friend and betrayed everyone he loved. Now, George wanted to get high again, in hopes that, this time, the crash would take him out entirely.



Dream went from having George's presence pretty constantly to not at all. He wasn't annoyed with anyone other than himself because it had barely been twenty-four hours since he last saw him and the emptiness sat painstakingly on his chest.

The last place he wanted to be was collective dinner, so he hid away in his room; losing himself in the motion of the whetstone sharpening the blade of his sword.

A knock sounded from his door, Dream was almost startled because he was so sure all the warriors were downstairs, eating.

Opening the door with reluctance, his hand slotting his blade at the back of his harness, Dream sighed, "What is it now, Sap—"

Shock didn't even begin to cover the sentiment that hit Dream like a pile of bricks at the sight of *George*—more dressed up than he was last night, but an overall dishevelled look; crown tilted, first few buttons of his black lacey dress shirt undone, one restless hand in the pocket of his slacks, the other wrapped at the neck of a near-empty wine bottle.

George cocked his head to the side, a grin plastered on his face. "Miss me?"

There was an empty look in his eyes and though they were always as dark as night, Dream just *knew* his pupils were dilated.

Dream looked at him and thought, *you look beautiful*. And George stared, grin reaching his eyes as he giggled. High and drunk, George was a calamitous beauty.

"Yes." Dream quietly replied because he could physically see George, yet it felt like he still wasn't *here*.

"Good, 'cause I want to hang out." George, without taking a beat, grabbed his wrist to pull Dream out.

A confused laugh issued past Dream's lips. "George," Voice powerless enough for George to keep walking, Dream's wrist firm in his grasp. "*George*."

George dropped his wrist, with his back to him, Dream watched him take a small breath before he turned around to face him: *fruitless smile, empty eyes*. "I wanna get wasted."

You've fallen. Dream masked his worry with a likely expression. "I don't even drink. Not really."

George rolled his eyes. "S'okay. I just want you there."

You have fallen. Or you would never say that so openly. "Not your...not your friends?"

Where are they?

"They're not alone like we are."

Where are you, George?

Dream stood still, beyond confused at the statement that clearly made sense to George—enough to have brought him here, drugged out of his mind.

George looked at him, in the same way he always did when his height vexed him from how close they stood. Except this time his eyes were bloodshot, screaming in inhaled crushed powder and smoked herbs.

“Hey,” Dream fought the urge to push the loose strands that shielded half his eyes. “Are you okay?”

For a moment, past that blank stare, Dream could have sworn he saw a piece of him shake his head ‘no’.

Instead, George coated his lips with a fake grin, stepping forward, causing Dream to straighten his shoulders at the enclosing space. “Want to go to the pub with you.” He tilted his head to the side, grin turning into a smirk. “What’d you say, Dream?” He drew in his bottom lip, eyes flickering down to his lips. “D’you want to play?”

With a thriving smirk at Dream’s dwelling compliance, because George was persuasive in the deadliest way, the consensus was made. It earned him a drunk giggle and intoxicated satisfaction.

But was it worth it, being the enabler to someone who craved self-destruction?



Dream had met and spoken to George when he was wasted, but this sort of high—he felt like he was being *presented* with a lively version of him while his soul was decaying within.

For once, George talked the most as they headed to the village pub. And Dream felt like he was hearing words, coherent sentences, yet none of them made any fucking sense.

George was speaking in riddles and for him being the only drunk of the two, Dream felt like he was getting *wasted* trying to decipher them.

“George?” A familiar voice spoke from a few feet ahead.

“Fuck’s sake,” George muttered from beside him.

Dream followed his eyes, peeking past a crowd that walked past them in the rowdy village, only for him to spot George’s three friends, surrounding a lamp post.

“You’re *drinking*?” Quackity squinted at George’s hand before un-pocketing his own and stalking towards him, Prince Karl and Princess Niki in tow.

Oh, fuck. Dream huffed, glancing down at the ground.

Speaking Dream’s thoughts, George let out a relented sigh. “Here we fucking go.”

“Did *you* do this to him?” Quackity made him his target, Dream was unmoved until George side-stepped his friend to stand in between them.

“Don’t fucking touch him.”

Dream couldn’t see George’s face from where he stood behind, but he could hear the slurred words

come out through gritted teeth.

Quackity let out a bitter laugh. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Alex, dude—”

“He’s fucking *wasted*, Karl.” Quackity flailed his hand at George.

Karl paused for a moment, gaze treading from Quackity to George. His shoulders instantly dropped with his parted lips. *He looked hurt.*

“Is that why you came down to mine today? And why you left so abruptly?”

George didn’t answer. A silence including indistinct chatter around them from people that had no idea of the tension their group held.

“Darling, what’s wrong?” Princess Niki went to take a step towards him, but the second George shot his head in her direction she froze.

“*Oh*,” George drawled out the syllables, menacing, in a tone Dream had never heard from him. “*Now* you wanna talk?”

“Why are you doing this?” Quackity asked, through a helpless breath.

Dream narrowed his gaze atop George’s head, waiting for a reply that he could almost sense would show more sides to him he didn’t think possible.

George began making his way past them until Quackity harshly gripped his elbow, shoving him back. Karl and Niki only sighed, not alarmed—*as if it were a common occurrence.*

“I don’t care that you relapsed, okay? Just...don’t go off with him.”

Why did Quackity suddenly have an issue with him, Dream thought as he diverted his gaze from the unavoidable scene in front of him.

“He hasn’t done shit, Q—”

“I don’t trust him.”

“Like you don’t trust me?” Something George had said caused all three of them to momentarily cease in their spot. “I overheard the three of you talking last night.”

Niki hung her head. “George—”

“Don’t, Niki.”

George averted his glare from her, she kept her eyes fixed on the ground.

“What did you hear?” Quackity hesitantly asked.

“Enough to know that you all think I’m not suitable for the crown.”

All three of them were quick to deny the statement, but George spoke over them.

“I’m not arguing that.” George shook his head. “You were right—I’m not. I wasn’t made for this, so I’m done. I’m done with all the training, all the pretending, all the stupid rules of kingship—I’m

done.”

“You’re not thinking straight—”

“I don’t want to *think*.”

“You need to sleep this off. We’ll talk in the morning.” Quackity went to grab him, but George stumbled back, Dream’s hand barely had time to stop him from falling against his chest.

“You’re not stopping me, Quackity.”

Quackity scowled at him before he looked over at Dream. “And you’re just gonna stand there? Let this happen—”

“Leave him *out* of it.” George spat.

Quackity sucked in a sharp breath, Dream could tell his patience was wearing thin. “If you go off with him, I’m going through with my plan.”

Dream wondered what the plan was from the way he felt George’s back stiff against his chest.

“Yeah?” George’s voice seemingly cracked before he straightened his shoulders, stepping forward so he was head to head with his friend. “Do it. See if I care.”

“George, don’t tell him that—” Karl went to say; Dream didn’t know him well, but it seemed as if he had never been this scared before.

“Why not?” George snapped his head in his direction before looking at Quackity. “I risk my life, you risk yours, right?” Dream could almost *hear* the smile he spoke through. “That’s the ultimatum here?”

Quackity rolled his eyes, pushing past him and most definitely shoving his shoulder into Dream’s arm as he passed him. “Talk to me when you come back to your senses, George.” He shouted from over his shoulder.

George spun on his heel, shouting back over Dream’s shoulder. “If I’m lucky, I won’t have to talk to you at all.”

Niki walked over just as George turned around and they both stopped dead in front of each other. “George, please—”

“I hope you find what you’re looking for.” Was the last thing George muttered as he walked past her, placed the empty wine bottle on a bench, and disappeared behind the doors of the pub.

Dream was left with Niki and Karl. Somehow, despite their differing relationship with George and Quackity, they all stood on a similar level of being bystanders to that scene.

Niki was the first to leave, following Quackity’s direction without a word, tears clear in her eyes.

“Listen—” Both Karl and Dream started, their words disappearing behind their closing lips.

Karl fished for something in his pocket before offering him a silver key. “Take this.” Dream flickered his gaze between the key and a pair of warm blue eyes. “George told me about the night you stayed over. So...you’ll probably need a place to crash when he’s all...” He waved the remaining words off. “...it’s my atelier, deep in the woods of Terra.”

Dream brought a hesitant hand to the key before looking at Karl, who gave him a small nod. The key was transferred, Karl stuttered in his steps.

He had something else to say, Dream didn't walk away just yet.

"Please, uh..." Karl's gaze oscillated on the ground, brows knitting before he looked up at Dream. "...can you just...make sure he's safe? You won't be able to stop him," He glanced at the pub doors before looking back at him. "But make sure he doesn't...like, I mean—"

"—I won't let anything happen to him." Dream said like it was the easiest thing to promise.

With a promise as such made to someone who still had so much love and care for George, despite the hurt, Dream was going to keep it with everything he had in him.

"Hey," George sniffled, tucking something in his pocket, *you went for more*. "Where were you?"

Dream feigned a smile, stealthily pocketing the key. "Just...outside—um, did you...get a drink?"

George broke into a soft grin, shaking his head.

"Let's get you one, yeah?" Earning a happy nod from the withering soul, Dream allowed himself to be tugged to a seat at the bar, where he could almost see the night derailing more than it already had.



"And she was standing on that table, right over there," Max pointed to the busy table on the far right of the bar. "Just dancing her little heart out."

A laugh choked out of George. "You're joking—your mum's *awesome*."

Dream looked at him through the space of his fingers, his hand had been covering his face throughout the entirety of this conversation.

The scene George and his friends had caused outside hadn't been forgotten, but the boisterous pub—busy on the night of their arrival—was almost exactly what they needed. He wondered, for a moment, how George managed to figure out the perfect time to come here for how visibly down he was.

And then it hit him as he watched how George acted in this place; wearing a bright and genuine smile—it seemed he was more at home here than he was out there.

Dream slowly drew his hands from his face. "She was, but *that's* just embarrassing—Max, why are we...why are we talking about this, right now?"

"Cause I asked." George furrowed his eyebrows, returning his gaze to Max. "And I wanna hear more about her."

"I mean I've got more stories—"

"No. We don't need to reminisce—" George's hand was quick to cover Dream's mouth, and he would've been startled but that's how it had been ever since they sat down here.

He was high, Dream wasn't forgetting that part, but George was getting touchy—either mindlessly leaning into him, wrapping a hand around his arm when a story told by Max would pique his interest, or tapping his hand as if to say, 'are you hearing this?', and Dream was so fucking

endeared he almost wanted to stay in that moment forever.

But he'd witnessed a 'high' way too many times—in the very seat George occupied—to know that the crash was just around the corner.

"I wanna hear it, Maxwell, if you don't mind." He shot Dream a small look, earning him a playful glare in return before George dropped his hand from his mouth.

"Sorry, Prince Clay." Max sucked the air between his teeth as he looked at Dream with a shrug. "King's orders."

George was way too wasted to have reacted to the hierarch title.

Instead, "Ha," George crossed his arms over the bar, leaning into it as he glanced at Dream, tongue stuck out tauntingly. "I win."

Dream suppressed a smile, shaking his head at him before dwindling a hand for Max to proceed.



George was sneaky when it came to ordering drinks. It took the sixth for Dream to notice that two almost inaudible taps on the counter was Max's Pavlov response to fetch him his usual—which Dream recalled was *not* just alcohol.

So, when George's head lied heavily on his palm, Dream was stealing worried glances—they were both meant to be listening to something Max was saying, but George was almost drifting off, the complacent grin he'd been wearing all night was much harder for him to muster, eyelids heavy and limbs weightless.

"I need to...leak—take..." He breathlessly chuckled. "...one."

His eyelids opened and closed slowly, vexing his steps when he slid off the stool and almost fell, were it not for Dream's hands which were quick to hold him up. George's hands pressed into his chest as he lazily blinked up at him.

"You okay?" Dream studied his features, reminded of how redundant his question had been.

George broke into a drunk smile before stumbling forward, arms indolently wrapping around Dream's shoulders. "Mhm," He mumbled onto his shoulder before turning his head, speaking against his jaw which he definitely mistook for his ear. "M'fine, Dr'm."

"I'll walk you." Dream's arms began to unwrap around his waist, but George pulled away from him.

"Walked every...inch of this pub blind. M'okay." George winked at him, tilting between the stools before he disappeared towards the bathroom.

Dream didn't realize he'd been attentively watching him until Max chuckled. "He's not wrong." Obtaining confused green eyes, the bartender continued. "I've seen that man knock down more drinks than my grandfather in the fifties, and he still manages to get home safe. With no help."

"I don't think that's an achievement." Dream huffed, crossing his arms over the bar before putting his head in his hands.

Max reeled his gaze onto him, drying a pint glass. "You're not letting history repeat itself by any

chance, are you, kid?"

Dream sighed. "What are you talking about, man?"

Max shrugged, turning the pint glass over on its drying pad. "Seeing a lot of similarities in him and Violette."

His mother's name nearly knocked a breath out of him. He thought about her every other day, but to hear her name so blatantly spoken, especially in this situation, ran a shiver down his spine.

"It's not like that." Dream denied—as if he hadn't been spotting the similarities from the very first night he saw George in this pub. "He's not like that."

Max clicked his tongue. "Odd that they settled for the same seat in here, though, no?" Dream shot him a small glare. "Kid, I'm not tryna kick you down. Just saying I've seen you pull her out of here more times than my heart could bear, for the both of you."

"It's not the same thing with him."

Max tossed the towelette over his shoulder before digging his palms into the counter. "King George has been keeping that seat warm almost immediately after your mother stopped coming in here. It's lookin' like the same thing."

After a few minutes, Dream caught movement in the corner of which George disappeared to, but he turned his attention to the sound of a weighted glass being passed to him.

Looking up from the swaying golden liquid, Dream caught Max's wink. "You'll need it."

Dream broke into a soft smile, ready to deny it because he had to be fully on guard for George, who when he looked over, was being cornered against the bar by another man.

George was allowing it to happen because he was pretty much lifeless the last time Dream saw him, which caused him to rise from his seat, something surging through him; picking up his pace the more the stranger threw himself at George.

"Piss off." George slurred, hand barely strong enough on the stranger's chest.

"Dude," Dream stepped in, placing a firm grip on the stranger's shoulder. "Back off."

"Mind your own business—"

Dream immediately shoved the grip he had on him, causing the man to stumble back, his hip slamming into the table behind him. He could feel the attention of the pub's crowd fall onto them, and he could almost hear the disappointment dripping in his father's tone for the scene he could see happening if *this fucking moron was gonna keep pushing*.

"He told you to *fuck off*." Dream walked towards him, beyond unfazed when the stranger straightened himself up, jaw set.

"He can't even fucking speak. So, how about you turn around," The stranger shoved his hands into Dream's chest, barely budging him. "And *you* fuck off."

There was something so barbaric in villagers who didn't care for those in the royal hierarchy; the respect they should have, turning into envy and jealousy, to spite and hatred.

So when the blade of a pocket knife cut Dream's cheek, the spite and hatred mirrored onto him.

Dream brought the pad of his fingers to the pooling blood, glancing down at the crimson liquid before smirking at the villager. “*Man*, I *really* wish you hadn’t done that.”

“Fuck are you gonna do? Call in the warriors to defend your ass over some brainless pretty thing —” Words flew from the stranger’s mouth when Dream’s fist collided against his jaw.

And when Dream grappled his shirt mid-stumble, jutting him at the table, a roar of either cheers or shock sounded from around him.

And when Dream knelt down to his scrambling body, grabbing him by the collar, *all he could see was red*. “He’s not a fucking ‘*thing*’.”

And he’d never lost control before. Not once had Dream not been able to suppress his anger, but his fist continued in a relentless roll of punches into the stranger’s face, every noise around him blurring into the background.

And he couldn’t stop. He didn’t want to stop.

Until *he* spoke his name, “Dream, you’re gonna *kill* him.” George’s voice pierced through his trance, only slowing down his punches, but not quite stopping them. “Dream, *stop*.”

With a firm grip around his arm, Dream’s actions miraculously ceased. Like he’d been suddenly sedated.

Dream blinked down at the face he barely recognized disgusting words coming from and a punched-out breath escaped him. *Holy fucking shit*.

“What the fuck,” George whispered shakily from behind him, still tugging his arm. “Let’s go—right now, let’s leave.” Dream staggered in his step as his eyes remained fixed on the bloody face, unsteady on his own footing as he slowly stood up.

Max weaved through the crowd that had formed over the course of the fight, kneeling down to the villager as he searched for his pulse. “Christ...” His eyes flew up to Dream, his heart sank at the scowl. “...do you know how fucking lucky you are that he’s still somehow breathing?”

Dream could feel pairs of eyes on him, but he could only focus on one. “Max...I’m—”

“It’s not the same, huh?” Max glanced at the person standing beside him, *George*. “Go home.”

George squeezed his hand, Dream allowed himself to be pulled towards the exit.

I lost control because of you,

“Are you alright?” *George* asked once they were outside.

And I gained it back because of you.

“Dream?” George peered up at him.

“Yeah,” Dream whispered. “Yes, I’m fine.”

George grimaced as he lightly tapped the cut on Dream’s cheek, earning a hiss from him. “We have to clean that up.”

“P-perfect.” Dream fished inside his pocket while George looked at him with confusion etched in his face until he pulled out a key. “Prince Karl—”

“His atelier.” George took the key from him before he closed it in his fist. “I’m an idiot.”

Dream’s brows knitted as he dipped his head down to search for his eyes. “What do you mean?”

George glimpsed up at him before shaking his head. “I hate this bit.”

“What bit?”

“Sobering up.”

Understanding wholly of the comedown containing regrets, Dream nodded. “You want me to walk you back to Salacia?”

“No.” George quickly answered, definitive. “Not tonight.” Dream scrutinized his features for any second guesses but to no avail. “Let’s clean that up.” He barely motioned to the cut on his cheek before turning on his heel.

And as they walked in silence, Dream kept stealing glances at George, *my breaking point and my anchor, how are you even real?*



The failure of a successful crash was what George meant when he had said ‘sobering up’. Because though Dream had a pretty good idea of his unwillingness to *exist*, he didn’t need the constant reminder.

The reason he’d been so careless and giving into unforgiving actions was that he was so sure he *wasn’t* going to wake from this.

George felt like he could have kept going. Could have returned from wherever he went off to mid-conversation with Max and asked for more drinks. *But the rate at which he sobered up, watching Dream beat the living shit out of that bastard, George side-eyed Dream’s bruising knuckles, is that who you are on the battlefield?*

And Karl. Who despite being betrayed, still offered his place up. George didn’t need to ask Dream how that came about; something along the lines of ‘protection’ spoke to him through a simple tended key. *You wanted me to be safe ‘cause you knew I wasn’t coming back home.*

That realization had him wanting to toss the remaining drugs from his pocket into the coursing brook beside the atelier.

Sobriety was a fool’s game, is what George told himself when he crashed into the embrace of his best friend.

“Is this it?” Dream asked as they stood in front of the wooden door.

“Yeah.” George nodded, voice hoarse.

But somehow, *fucking somehow*, George found himself never wanting to fall again. Because no matter how hard he tried, the crash never took him out. And if falling meant he would be dropped back in front of his three friends, hurt and betrayal corroding their expressions for the umpteenth time, then George was fine being the fool.

Because though he couldn’t bear the thought of going through kingship sober, the disappointment he’d face after a failed crash was much worse.

And George just wanted to be good, for them.

The door shut behind him, George's hand was intuitive on the light switch, illuminating the atelier in a warm glow. George mindlessly set his crown on the counter before opening the cabinets where Karl kept his healing containers.

Hoisting himself on the counter and placing the retrieved wooden box beside him, George looked up hesitantly at Dream who stood a few feet away. "I don't bite." He tried to joke, but it fell flat.

Dream forced a smile before walking over, standing just a few inches away from George's parted legs.

A tense silence thickened around them; shuffling items in the kit was the only thing heard.

Dream's chuckle was faint, but it caught George's attention after he dipped a piece of cotton in rubbing alcohol.

George hovered the cotton over the cut, his free hand resting inches above Dream's shoulder as he went to steady him. "What?" He stole a glimpse at him before following through with his actions.

Dream seemingly relaxed under his touch, George could see his gaze fixed onto him from his peripheral. "Less than a half-hour ago, you could barely stand up and now you're...treating me."

George weakly smiled, dabbing the cotton onto the cut only to earn a hiss from Dream. "Good." He jokingly scolded, earning a mild look from him. "That's what you get for starting a bar fight." He continued with the dabs, feeling the tension of Dream's shoulder under his hand.

"It wasn't for fun." Dream noiselessly replied.

George momentarily stopped the cotton daubs, quickly glancing at him. "I know." He continued, only to stop again when Dream flinched, jutting his head away. "Stop moving, idiot." He watched a smile grow on Dream's lips following the term before he slowly spread his legs. "You can squeeze my leg if you need to, just stay still."

Dream twitched under his hand, neither of them moved for a second until he slowly stepped in between George's legs. They both seemingly tensed at the warmth that settled in their pressed limbs, warmth which mostly radiated off Dream.

A hesitant hand rested on George's thigh and if he wasn't so numbed out from all of the drugs, despite the looming comedown, the feel of the light grip would've stirred him.

George disposed of the cotton, going for a fresh one which he dipped in an alchemized oil he remembered using on Quackity's wounds when they were younger. He pushed down the memories that flooded back: *Quackity not wanting to get in shit with Anthea after getting in non-mandated fights*, George willingly having his back, no questions asked.

"Chin up, please." George's tone adopted a whisper, working with the quiet of the atelier; Dream complied, looking at him through a lidded gaze. "You alright?" *You're staring*, was what he meant to say.

Dream cleared his throat, "Yeah," looking away long enough for George to smile to himself.

The premise of his invitation to Dream tonight didn't stem from avoiding his friends because he was wasted, but because something about Dream's presence bought him a sense of tranquillity that he couldn't quite place.

Being alone is easier when you're around, intermingled his reply to Dream hours ago: *'they're not alone like we are.'*

George realized he was sobering up quicker than expected when he felt the squeeze of Dream's hand around his thigh. "Few more seconds."

"What the fuck did Prince Karl put in this?" Dream used his free hand to pick up the oil flask.

Heart and spirit—sleepless nights worth of effort. "Dunno," George mumbled, even if he'd witnessed its creation.

Another silence with Dream's watchful stare passed, George disposed of the cotton, searching for puny band-aids, "He cares for you, you know?" his fingers halted around the plaster tabs, "Even if you think you messed up, he cares for you." George averted his gaze, bringing the manila fabric to Dream's cut.

Fuck, patching the plaster over the cut, George clenched his jaw; *this* was the crash.

"You're blaming yourself," Dream continued, fearlessly. "And you shouldn't—"

"Stop." George's breath susurrated. *Don't stop.*

"You did nothing wrong—" George's hand slid over Dream's shoulder as he desisted his self-restraints, *reassure me*, leaning into him, *help me escape from myself*, forehead crashing onto his other shoulder.

Pull me out, George relaxed in his hold, *I want to be good*, fainéant arm slung over, pulling Dream in, legs squeezing his waist. Dream wrapped his arms around his torso, the warmth at his thigh momentarily lost before it encompassed him. *I want to be good again.*

"I'm sorry." George's voice was muffled against the fabric of Dream's shirt, but the tightness around his frame assured him that he'd heard it. *You stuck by me this whole night, put up with my recklessness.*

"You have nothing to be sorry for—"

You got injured because of me. George shook his head. "You shouldn't have to take care of me."

Dream sighed. "*You* took care of *me*."

From the resonance of Dream's response, George knew he wasn't talking about the wound healings.

"And you never expected a 'thank you'," Dream hushed against his shoulder. "You're a *good* person, George."

Dream went to say something else, but when George pulled away slightly, morals and self-restraint beyond forgotten, he tried to kiss him.

But Dream pulled away fully, startled and wide-eyed. George's hands fell to the counter, his eyes strained onto Dream, just as surprised.

"I'm sorry—I can't—"

"No, it's..." George swallowed, shaking his head at his lap. "...I shouldn't have—"

"I've been lying to you." Dream deadpanned.

George crossed his arms over his chest before he looked to the side. *I know*, he wanted to say.

"Say something, please." Dream silently begged.

George's eyes fluttered shut with a small shrug. "What'd you want me to say?" He looked over at him. "What did you lie about?"

Dream blinked at him, *I can see your tears, even if they aren't so obvious*. "About The Nether." *I've known you*. "My father..." *I've known this*. "...forged the letter that he presented to you." *I expected this*. "He initially told me that it was a threat. He told me that and I believed him. And then I found out that he used Queen Anthea's passing to—to his advantage and I tried to tell him how *fucked up* that was, but he threatened me. He threatened me not to tell you—I wanted to tell you, George, I wanted to tell you more than anything."

He threatened you. George remembered walking in on them; Sebastian's firm grip around his son's jaw as he essentially held the royal crown over his head as blackmail. *He has you on strings*.

"Every training session, it was *all* I could think about." Dream ran a hand through his hair, cheeks flushed, eyes glossy. "It tore me apart having to lie to you about something so *fucked*. You didn't deserve it. No one deserves to be used like that and I wanted to tell you," His chest rose and fell, and it almost hurt witnessing the wreck of the burden Sebastian cast on his son. "But he has me on a *fucking leash*, George. And I know that's not an excuse—"

"Dream—"

"And I understand if you hate me—"

"Dream, that's enough." George only slightly raised his voice, not wanting to inflict more mental images of Sebastian onto him. "It's okay."

Dream's lips parted once again as he stared back, perplexed. "...What? *What do you mean* 'it's okay'? It's not okay."

George sighed, his palm sliding to the left of the counter, hitting the grills of the stove. "I've known, Dream. Not for long, but...I've known. It's fine."

"You're just saying that." Dream huffed, hanging his head. "You're just fucking saying that. It's not fine. It's not okay."

A scalding burn inflicted itself onto George's palm, causing him to instinctively draw his hand from the stove until he noticed its rings turning orange. He paused for a moment, Dream's rantings blurred momentarily as he began looking around the atelier.

And sure enough, he elicited a terse breath, *the logs in the pit of the fireplace burst into flames*.

"How can you say that?" Dream seethed. "He fucking *used* you. He made *me*—" He jutted his finger into his chest. "*—lie straight* to your face."

"Dream..." George kept glancing at the growing flames of the firepit, augmenting with Dream's repressed anger, the same anger which belonged to the person that threw ruthless punches at that stranger in the pub.

"I'm sorry." Embers crackled from thriving fire, the stove rings grew red. "I'm so, so fucking sorry

—”

“It’s okay—hey,” George uncrossed his arms, reaching for him. “Come here,” He wrapped a hand around his wrist, almost flinching at how fiery his skin felt against his own. “Please?” He tugged.

And Dream complied, just as he had in the pub when he simmered under his touch. *Just as I assumed.* He lurched into the space of George’s legs, inherent arms around his waist, *pulling* him in. And almost immediately, George felt the likeness of the fire from the hearth and stove, eating him whole.

Wincing, George clutched tightly onto him, Dream did the same. *It was burning him within*, past the fabric of his dress shirt, encircling every inch of his skin. Dream tightened his grip, his anger greedy for George’s innate cold.

George was biting down on his lip so hard, he could almost taste the blood. *But you needed this.* Flimsy fingers in blonde locks, George worriedly looked over Dream’s head to the fireplace, *if you don’t take this from me, you’re going to burn this entire place down.*

“I’m so sorry.”

No matter how bone-crushing or scorching Dream’s clinging hold felt, George braced himself, forcing words out of his mouth.

“What did I say about sorries?” A contrived chuckle fled past his lips, George lulled his head back to take a breath—*it hurt, holding him.* “You should have probably told me,” He winced, stifling his whimper. *It hurt,* “But you weren’t lying to me out of spite, Dream,” *so why did it feel bearable—good? Did this feel good?*

Blonde strands filled the space of his rigid fingers. “It would’ve probably saved me the trouble of preparing for war, but...” He brought a free hand to Dream’s bicep, squeezing it as pain coursed through him. “...*fuck*, let’s face it, I can’t escape the crown.” He squeezed his eyes shut. “Whether or not your father incited this battle on a lie, fighting would inevitably be required of me throughout this kingship.”

George blinked up at the ceiling, breathing in through his nose. “Was never gonna learn how if it wasn’t for you, wouldn’t have been able to use my powers. You,” He captured his bottom lip again, suppressing a wince. “You did that for me. Prepared me for the most fatal part of this fucking burden.”

The fire had slowly been dying down, the stove was cooling, Dream’s grip loosened—only slightly as he nuzzled his head in the crook of George’s neck.

“Don’t blame yourself for what your father did,” George whispered in his hair before leaning his back into the cupboards, almost lightheaded; Dream adjusted himself so he could rest his temple on his collarbone. “But he’ll fucking ruin you if you don’t stand up to him.” When he brought his lips to his forehead, he realized how Dream still ran concerningly hot. “He did this to you, Dream.”

“I can’t...” Dream brokenly whispered, George’s heart sank. “He’ll...he’ll pass the crown down to my brother instead of me. And I need—I need to be the next ruler or nothing will change after he passes. *I need* to inherit that crown, George. Punz will follow all of my father’s wishes. Vulcan won’t ever know peace. But...but I won’t ever lie to you—I promise I won’t lie to you again.”

Sensing the enhancement in the heat surrounding them, George lightly moved him, only for Dream

to rest his forehead against his cheek, this time. He wasn't sure when it clicked; either when he'd pull Dream off that villager, or just now when the flames died down following their crushing embrace. But George diligently cuffed up his sleeves before resting his forearms on his lap, where Dream's eyes were set.

Dream hesitated, for a moment, before sliding his blazing touch over George's forearms, breath ragged, but resting in between his lips.

When Dream's shoulders relaxed, eyelashes fluttering in muted exhilaration, George glimpsed down at him, his lips the only thing noticeable from his point of view. "S'that nice?"

Dream's eyebrows pinched together as he nodded.

And it burnt him, George wrapped his hands around Dream's elbows for support, *and it felt fucking reviving*.

"George?" Almost inaudible, tone wrapped in golden honey; George hummed in response. "I think...I lost control today."

A laugh exalted through a brief exhale. "You *think*?"

Dream simpered, leaning his forehead into his cheek, brushing the pad of his thumb over his biceps. "But I gained it back when you...when you called for me—touched me." George's smile was gradual, the delivery of a truth he was growing accustomed to resting on the tip of Dream's tongue as he said, "You asked me if I had an anchor," He released his grip around George's forearms, returning one hand to his thigh and the other at his waist. "It's you, George."

I know, George lightly grinned, returning his fingers where they naturally settled through Dream's hair, his other hand resting at the nape of his neck.

After a moment, Dream grazed his lips against George's neck with a soundless, "It's you."

George leaned his cheek against Dream's, bringing his lips to his ear, "Dream..." *slowly hushed and nursed*; his breath hitched in tandem with Dream's when the blonde's hand immediately clutched George's thigh as if something he had said stunned him.

Dream tipped his chin up slightly, dragging each whispered word from the corner of George's mouth to his cheekbone as he slowly breathed out, "I'd like to kiss you."

George fluttered his eyes shut at the sheer purity and docile tone of the proposition; leaning his cheek into Dream's soft lips before nudging the tips of their noses.

Foreheads pressed, George lethargically sighed out against their brushing lips, "I'd like that."

Dream squeezed his waist, delicately tugging him forward, deriving a small gasp from George as he whispered against his mouth, "Can I?"

George adjusted his arms around his shoulders, fingers slack in his blonde hair as he brushed his bottom lip against Dream's, hushing the syllables into his mouth, "Yes, please."

An ardent heat girded them as their hands roamed their fevered skin; everything was so gentle and tender and George felt like his heart could explode from irrepressible desire.

Dream was on the brink of fulfilling their burning avidity until the door to the atelier burst open; a gust of cold wind pushed through, and they were immediately ripped from their hold on each

other.

Dream staggered back, George's head turned to the intruder—*Karl*.

Karl barely looked at them, Dream and George shared a glance before looking back at Karl, who continued to frantically search for things in the chest next to the couch.

“Karl?” George asked, quiet at first, which urged him to hop off the counter when Karl continued in a silent frenzy. “Karl,” He walked over, descending the small steps. “*Karl*.” He raised his voice, finally earning his eyes—bloodshot, tear-ridden.

“*What?*” Karl scowled.

“What’s wrong?” George’s eyes studied his features.

“What do you *think*?” Karl spat.

George steadied his breathing. “What’s happened?”

Karl’s glare dissipated into his scrunching features, tears welling up in his eyes. George stared, terrified because seeing him like this wasn’t a common occurrence, and when it did happen, nothing good was to follow.

Karl’s teeth chattered, tears began rolling down his cheek. “Alex is hurt...*really* badly.”

George’s heart raced. “How...” He swallowed. “...how badly, Karl?”

Karl whimpered, lips quivering shut, shaking his head defiantly.

“*Karl—*”

“It’s been forty-five minutes since I last felt his pulse.”

Chapter End Notes

hi hi hello.

the chapters are getting Thick, aren't they? lmao.

thank u for the <3 treat yourselves well, as you should always.

till' next update x (:

The Father Complex

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Le Temps mange la vie, ennemi obscure qui nous ronge le cœur.

Time eats you away. George sat at Quackity's bed, his upper half perched over, hand clasped around his, pressed against his lips which hushed prayers to a God he didn't believe in. *Like an obscure enemy that gnaws at your heart*, a tear slipped down his cheek as he glimpsed up at Quackity's shut eyelids; lifeless and hardly breathing.

"Son, Karl got his pulse back. We should wait it out at home, now, yeah?"

"I'm not leaving him."

Waiting, time passes—O, douleur— pain encircled his heart the longer he stared at Quackity—*time passes and he doesn't wake up.*

Time eats you away. Waiting is fucking painful.

"C'mon, Q," George whispered against his cold hand once Cole shut the door behind him as he left his son in his denial. "Can't lose you. Not you, too." He rested his head onto his bandaged stomach, *slow breaths*. "Come back to me." He pressed a soft kiss onto his hand. "Please." A tear fell onto the fabric wrapped around Quackity's waist, fanned over by George's hair as he nuzzled his forehead onto him. "I love you."

"*I love you.*" George had said to him, on a cold evening in March.

Quackity had opened a handful of presents following an embarrassment he couldn't help but feel with all the attention he'd receive on his birthday.

"*What?*" Quackity had heard it.

"*I love you.*" George's smile beamed through his features. "*I'm glad you're part of this family and —*" His words were cut off when he was pulled into a hug, one that took him by surprise because that was the first time Quackity initiated it, despite having lived in the palace for five years.

"*I trust you,*" Quackity had said in return.

It wasn't the same three words, but it held the same meaning for him. George knew that. George knew him. He spent his entire childhood making sure he knew him, so he didn't feel the tiniest bit uncomfortable living under their roof.

"*He doesn't really know how to speak, just yet. So, we'll get him a governess and—*"

"*I can teach him.*"

"*George, honey...that requires a lot of learning on both ends. He doesn't really know much other than his name.*"

"*I will learn.*" George had said affirmatively. "*For him, I'll learn.*"



“Thanks for doing this, you two,” Cole said to Karl and Niki when they entered the Salacian palace. “I don’t know why Alex would...” He cowered, shaking his head.

Niki and Karl shared a quick glance: he wasn’t made aware of the real reason behind Quackity’s visit to Vulcan that night. And he wasn’t to know, neither was Felicity.

They were already dealing with so much, “That’s our Alex.” Karl chuckled lightly, a paltry smile accompanied by a weak tap on Cole’s shoulder. “He’ll be okay. I’ll make sure of it. Get some rest, okay?”

Cole waved them off upstairs to where he had hoped that Karl and Niki would retrieve clothes for George to change into since he didn’t seem to be leaving Quackity’s side any time soon.

It had been five hours since the incident happened. Karl remembered every moment leading up to when he’d heard the crash from the Vulcan hallway.

Karl *remembered* reading Sebastian’s plan against The Mind, despite not having time to read the whole thing, he had grasped enough to validate Quackity’s assumptions.



***The Mind** is in agreement to join the **Elementul Kingdom**. **Queen of Eurus** and I, **King of Vulcan**, have concocted this plan to execute the killing of **Queen of Salacia**.*

In eliminating the Salacia realm, we will have a territory for The Mind.

Queen Victoria cannot inherit the powers as she is part of the Epistemic Spectrum, not the Emotional. Therefore Queen Anthea is to die by my hand. I will inherit the powers of a Waterborn Royal, turning Vulcan into a conjoint Fire and Water realm.

*To follow is the killing of George, **Prince of Salacia**, for every and all Salacian Royal must be executed for a successful transfer of the powers.*

Signed By

King of Vulcan, Queen of Eurus.

It remained in his jostled thoughts, which he barely had time to process when he stealthily left Sebastian’s study and found Quackity, as well as Sapnap, severely wounded, and nearly lifeless on the ground.

As he carried Quackity to Terra, ushering his mother to send one of their warriors to fetch Sapnap, all Karl could think about was how Cole, and more importantly, George was to react to it.

And fuck, witnessing Quackity’s fatal injuries was one thing, but the addendum of George’s reaction was soul-crushing.

“*You have to fix him,*” George had said, after entering the room Quackity was getting treated in.

“*We’re trying—*”

George rose his voice, his guard crashing down around him. “*No. I don’t think you understand.*

You're not going to try, Karl. You are gonna fix him—

“George—”

George had stalked towards him, grabbing Karl by the shoulders. *“You're going to bring him back.”* Tears pushed past his eyes and streamed down his face in a rageful course. *“You're bringing him back to me. You're fixing him, you're bringing him back—”*

“I will, George. I will.” Karl pushed his hands off before pulling him into a tight embrace, George dropped all of his weight onto him, clutching onto his suit jacket.

“You're bringing him back. You're bringing him back. You're bringing him back to me.” George shouted through his lament, heaved and relentless in his manifestation as he brought himself and Karl to their knees, dropping to the ground. *“Bring him back to me.”*

“I will—”

“Please.” George brokenly whimpered into Karl's tear-stained neck, susurrated words as he continued to weep, *“He's m-my little brother...you h-have to.”*

Karl's soothing hands momentarily ceased on his back as the blatant term shocked him.

Everyone always said it, everyone always thought it: how George and Quackity fought like brothers, but more importantly, protected each other as such.

And everyone except Quackity and George had *vocally* said it, rolling their eyes in feigned annoyance when someone would point it out.

Neither of them had openly called each other “brother” and meant it. And to hear it through a lament as George brought himself and Karl down to their knees, through helpless begging, was *fucking* tantalizingly heartbreaking.

So Karl wasn't just blindly reassuring him when he had said, *“I'm gonna bring him back to you—to us.”*

No, that was a promise. Because George had just lost his mother, and the last thing he needed was to lose Quackity, too.

With all of that sitting heavy on his chest, Karl had mustered enough energy to bring Quackity's pulse back, but that didn't fix what was to be dealt with when Quackity would eventually wake. *Because it's always one problem after another in this godforsaken kingdom, isn't it?*

“Oh my god...” Niki breathed out as they stepped foot into George's room.

The daylight uncovered everything that had happened in the darkness sitting between those four walls, almost six hours prior; loose papers and books, empty bottles of liquor and clothing items all strewn over the floor.

“Brings you back, doesn't it?” Karl tried to joke as he brushed past Niki, progressing into the room, careful to step over some books before picking them up.

“I don't know if I want to be brought back.” Niki huffed, kicking the door shut with the heel of her boots before crouching down. *“I mean...”* She picked up an empty bottle of wine, *“...should we worry? Is he...falling again?”*

Karl frowned, passing his palm over the book cover before slotting it back onto the bookshelf. “He was doing good for a while, which...” He shrugged, picking up another astray book from the piano to return it to its rightful place. “...honestly kind of surprised me—I mean, it was too quick of a recovery for how dependent he is on drugs and alcohol, petal.”

“I believe he could do it.” Niki quietly said, stacking up a few papers as she progressively cleared the floor from them. “I think if it wasn’t for what he overheard, he wouldn’t have snapped.”

“Well, I think after today’s events, he won’t wanna go back,” Karl mumbled, eyes coursing over all the books he returned to their spot.

Following a silence, Karl turned on his heel to glimpse at Niki, whose gaze was fixed on the paper above all the others; some ripped from his journal, others he’d write on the back of when an idea came too quick and he didn’t want to lose his train of thought.

“What’s wrong?” Karl furrowed his eyebrows when he saw Niki tearing up.

“It’s a list he made for Q.”

Karl’s confusion grew until he took the page that was tended to him; reading over it, he noticed it was somewhat of a timeline, a sentence or two accompanying each date.

“This was...back when—”

“Anthea brought Alex home.” Niki wiped a tear that slipped down her cheek.

Karl bit his bottom lip as he glanced down at the letter, eyes beginning to well up as he took in every word written in George’s handwriting.

ALEX

12/14 - *He won’t say anything about it, but if you can avoid ambushing him in a hug or you can stop people from greeting him like they greet everyone—then step in. He doesn’t like physical affection. But he wants to learn how.*

12/31 - *Prefers orange juice over apple juice. Weird.*

01/01 - ~~Likes~~ *Loves bacon. And sausage. Only the linked kind.*

01/19 - *Prefers cake with hard frosting.*

01/28 - *He has nightmares. Don’t get in bed to comfort him, or wake him up from them. Just sleep on his floor as you did. Somehow he knows you’re there and that calms him down.*

02/01 - *He doesn’t know how to properly use utensils yet.*

The date with the statement struck a memory of a dinner Karl and his mother had attended. He remembered Anthea quietly asking George why he was eating with his hands instead of his cutlery, especially since important guests were around.

“Eating? Obviously.” George had said before shamelessly grabbing the steak as Quackity had shocked nearly everyone at the table by initially doing so.

Always protecting him, always making sure he wasn’t feeling out of place, Karl shook his head, smiling to himself.

02/28 - *Short temper. He's working on it. I don't think he should have to. Other kids suck. He had every right to get mad.*

03/04 - *Has a scar on the back of his neck. Don't touch it or mention it when you're cleaning his wounds next time.*

03/06 - *His parents suck. He doesn't want to meet them. Stop mum from asking if he does.*

03/16 - *He's okay with hugs. Don't do it all the time, you'll know when to.*

03/20 - *Has a hard time saying 'I love you'. You might have to say it for him. And mean it when you do. I meant it. And I think I always will.*

Niki sniffled. "This must...this must be so hard on him."

Karl looked at her with a frown. "You should have...seen him when he first entered that room—god, Niki...he...he was a *mess*. And," He drew in a breath. "He called him his little brother."

Niki quietly gasped before breaking into a tearful smile. "God, they're so..."

Karl chuckled. "Look, we should get back to George. He shouldn't be left alone in the state he's in right now."

"I can tell he's blaming himself," Niki tucked fresh clothes in a tote bag.

Karl followed her out of the room. "Of course he is. He's facing his comedown."

"We have to get him to stop." Niki jogged down the staircase, Karl at her side. "You have to talk to him."

"I don't know if *I* can get him to stop," Karl leaped over the last step.

"Nonsense," Niki swung the door open, allowing him to go first. "You're the only person he listens to."

"Only when it comes to advice," Karl turned on his heel, walking backwards to hold eye contact with her as he said, "But George's antidote for quitting?" Remembering how George went on a clean streak the moment he started spending time with a certain blonde-headed prince, Karl concluded, "That's not *me*, petal."

Niki scoffed, unconvinced. "Who else could it be?"



"Dream."

Light taps against his cheek had him blinking his eyes open to meet a friendly face. In the split second he discerned Sapnap, Dream sprang up in his seat, pulling him in his arms.

"Hey, baby." Sapnap teased through a laugh.

Dream relievingly sighed before he shoved him. "You fucking idiot."

To say he was going through a whirlwind of emotions would be exact. Because the moment Dream entered Terra, he felt like he hadn't had the time to catch his breath.

Even if it'd been *relieving as fuck* having George on that counter, his legs wrapped around his waist, arms pulling him in—the very thoughts that vexed him during Saturnalia.

Fuck. George. He was still facing his comedown and the possible loss of his best friend.

Angel-faced calamitous beauty whose silky lips tasted of burning liquor. Dream could still feel them against his.

But he hadn't even had the time to process any of that, not after Prince Karl stated that Sapnap was also in bad shape, just sporting less so fatal injuries in comparison to Quackity—who he hadn't physically seen, but could only imagine the damage done following Sapnap's loss of control.

Dream lost George's retention the moment they broke apart from that near-kiss. And it was painful, watching him silently spiral as he followed Prince Karl into the room where Quackity resided. But Dream had worries of his own, which when asked if he wanted to stay here with Sapnap or go home and await his arrival, staying was a no-brainer.

"Damn, I don't even get a smooch?" Sapnap pouted before he burst into a grin following Dream's stifled smile.

"What the hell happened?" Dream sighed, elbows digging into his knees as he glanced up at him.

"Just a little brawl, you know how it is." Sapnap chuckled, wincing as he peeped the cut on his abdomen.

Dream's eyes coursed over his naked upper half, bandaged and stitched up. "You could have died."

"Right, but I didn't." Sapnap jovially pointed at him. "You should see the other guy."

Dream shot him a disapproving look. "That's not funny."

Sapnap's expression dulled. "Is he...alright?"

Dream looked away from him. "Last I heard, they managed to get his pulse back. Still hasn't woken up, though."

Sapnap huffed, glancing at the window where the sun stood high in the middle of the skyline.

"If it wasn't conducive code for Terran royals to treat every fallen warrior, they would've killed you by now." Dream hadn't even tried to joke, wavering his stare on Sapnap.

Sapnap clicked his tongue, glancing down at his stomach. "I didn't mean for it to get out of hand ___"

"What even happened?"

Sapnap cocked an eyebrow. "Answer me something first?"

"What—"

"The fuck you got a bandaid on your face for?" Before Dream could answer, Sapnap glimpsed down at his bruised knuckles. "Same reason as that?"

"It was dumb." Dream waved it off. "That's not what matters—"

"Who'd you get in a fight with?" Sapnap asked through a smirk.

“Some moron in the pub that tried to hit on George. He wasn’t able to push them off ‘cause he was...wasted.”

“Dude...” Sapnap narrowed his eyes on him.

“What?”

“You have, like...*feelings* for him.” The emphasis was said with near-disgust it almost derived a laugh from Dream.

“Tell me what happened. I’m serious.”

“I was speaking with Sebastian in the dining hall. Punz came in, freaking out. Said someone was trying to break into your father’s office. So, he sent me to stop them from doing so.”

Dream’s eyes widened. “He sent you out on your own?”

“His best warrior wasn’t at hand.” Sapnap briefly looked him up and down. “So he asked his second best.”

“Did he know who you’d be going up against?” Dream asked through slightly gritted teeth, almost like he knew the imminent answer.

Sapnap slowly nodded, urging words out the moment Dream’s lips twitched up as he rolled his eyes. “Punz mentioned it—Dream, yo, hey—” He reached for his hand when he stood up. “—don’t do anything stupid.”

“Oh, no? Stupid like him sending you off alone against Salacia’s *best* warrior? And for what? Having his shit broken into?”

“Can you blame him, dude?”

“If it nearly got you killed? *Yes.*” Dream tugged his wrist from his grasp.

“I’m fine—”

“I can’t fucking do this.” Dream went for the door, his mind set on berating his father.

“*Dream.*”

“What?” Dream growled, turning to face him. “He can’t keep getting away with this shit.”

“Fine, yes, you’re right. But...” Sapnap rolled his eyes, stirring in his bed. “...can you just, like, sit with me for a bit, bro?”

Dream’s features softened with a small sigh. “Yeah.” He returned to his seat. “For a bit, *bro.*”

“Murder can always wait.” Sapnap joked.

Dream chuckled weakly, eyes drawing to the wraps around his hands. “Sap?”

“Yeah?”

“I think I’m at the point where I’d consider it.”

Sapnap veered his gaze to him. “...Consider what?”

Dream locked eyes with him.

Sapnap's eyebrows shot up. "Killing Sebastian?"

Dream shot him a look before angrily hushing, "You wanna say that any fucking louder?"

Sapnap went to sit up but immediately hissed in pain. "Wait," He reclined back. "For real?"

"I wanna hear what he has to say first." Dream's gaze fluctuated with a bit of hesitation, "But yeah," He slowly nodded. "For real."



Remorse was George's worst enemy.

Because remorse for not being present during the battle against The Mind is what pushed him to crack, and remorse for being too fucked out of his mind to stop Quackity from following through with his plan had him *craving* a high now more than ever.

And it always went this way: this relentless, never-ending cycle that dragged him through life by his neck.

Remorse, relapse, remorse, relapse—and he was so fucking *exhausted*.

And pissed. Angry. Infuriated with the universe because—*you always take the ones who deserve it the least to allow more space for ghosts like me to aimlessly roam around.*

Roam around with remorse for *Karl*—soundlessly asleep next to Niki on a loveseat, a few feet away from Quackity's bed. Karl, who hadn't said anything about George's betrayal, yet still held him when he was a sobbing mess, or got him fresh clothes, or *still* cared.

Why do you love me when I hurt you? George frowned as his eyes wavered onto him. *I am so sorry.*

"Even on my deathbed, you're *still only* looking at Karl." Quackity's voice spoke from his right.

And for a moment, George thought, *you must be going crazy*. But he turned, mostly expecting to be met with Quackity's shut eyelids, but—*no fucking way*—he was propped up on one elbow, lightly grinning at him through droopy eyes.

George's lips parted with ghosting words as he stared back in shock.

"You're not dreaming." Quackity laughed, the sound augmenting with the progressing shock in George's expression. "*Ooh*, or are you?" He continued through an inward giggle, George's eyes welled up. "*Boo!*" He jerked in his bed, a tear slipped past George's eyes. "Hey, woah," His features tempered with his fading laugh. "George—"

Lips quivering, George whimpered out, "I thought I lost you."

"Fuck, George. I'm sorry, I'm sorry," Quackity barely had time to lean forward before he was engulfed into George's embrace, the both of them falling back onto his bed. "Hey," His chuckle muffled itself in the crook of his neck. "No, no. I'm here."

"I thought you died." George shakily breathed out, squeezing him into the space of his arms, for fear that if he didn't hold tight enough, Quackity would disappear—*this* moment would disappear.

"I'm right here." Quackity giggled, rubbing circles into his back.

"I'm s-sorry." George sobbed onto his bare shoulder.

Quackity hushed him. "You've blamed yourself enough, I can see it in your face," He pulled away with force, George clinging onto him had him chuckling to himself. "'Ey, pull—" He cradled George's teary face. "—pull yourself together, dude. I'm *right* here."

George broke into a grin, seeing Quackity through a blurry gaze. "You're here." He squeezed his shoulders. "You're here."

"No shit. Who's gonna look after your dumb ass?" Quackity juttied his chin at him, offering a light tap on his cheek before dropping his hands. "I'm not dying before you."

Looking at him, the familiar beauty signs and tiny moles he had memorized over the years of *knowing* him, and from countless conversations they had, namely the one in the kitchen following Neptanalia, George half-smirked, "You're not dying point-blank." He recited.

Quackity paused for a second before he, too, broke into a knowing smile.

They heard shuffling at the door and before either of them could turn around to look, Karl and Niki woke up.

"What the *fuck*?" Karl shouted as Niki jolted from the couch to run towards them.

Felicity and Cole walked in, both startled at the sight before them. It all happened so fast, the rate at which everyone doused Quackity in more love than he'd like to bear.

Cole was the only one with his arms still secured around him by the time everyone pulled away and George smiled to himself when Quackity blushed with the overwhelming amount of affection.

"*Colbert...*" A breath was punched out of him. "...you're kinda crushing my bones, pal."

Cole pulled away, pushing back his tears as he held Quackity's face. "What were you thinking? Getting in childish fights." He shook his head, pulling him back into his arms.

They didn't know the real reason, Karl, Niki, and George shared a glance, *let's keep it that way.*

With George's relapse, and Quackity's near-death, the last thing Cole needed was the truth behind that forged letter.

Quackity's features softened. "Sorry. I didn't mean to worry you."

"I'm just glad you're okay."

It was no secret Cole and Anthea treated Quackity like their own. It hadn't even taken much for them to worry, care, and love him as much as they did George.

It wasn't something they just said, you could see it in the way Anthea would go off her hinges if someone forgot the smallest detail in preparations for Quackity's birthday. Or how now, Cole was holding him like letting go would be the cruellest thing.

"Christ." Felicity daubed the tears that pricked her eyes. "I'm gonna...go make you some food—"

"Aw, *Fel-bell*," Quackity cooed. "You're going *soft*—"

“Shush.” Felicity playfully glared at him before exiting the room.

“I’ll go help her—don’t you dare move.” Cole shot him a look as he stood up from the bed.

Quackity rolled his eyes. “Cole, I’m pretty sure my lungs are scorched down to their ashes. I’m gonna pass out before I even make it to the *door*.”

Cole worriedly glanced at Karl, whose eyes widened at him. “He’s joking—tell him you’re joking, you clown—”

“Pullin’ ya leg, pal.” Quackity winked at Cole, deriving a relented sigh from him.

“You’re gonna put me in the ground sooner than expected.” Cole huffed, hand over his forehead as he exited the room, but not before stealing one last concerned glance at Quackity, who shooed him away.

“I’m so glad you’re here.” Niki sniffled, nestling herself under Quackity’s arm as he laid his head atop hers.

And what should’ve been a heartfelt moment was quickly enclosed by the look he and Karl shared, which George and Niki caught. There was a beat of silence where the differing pairs debated on speaking their linked thoughts.

Until, “I gotta tell you guys something.” Karl quietly said.

George and Niki nodded, simultaneously saying, “We know.”



Niki sucked in a sharp breath, vastly standing up from the bed, walking away from it with her head in her hands.

“That bastard.” Quackity shook his head. “I had a fucking feeling.”

He was after me now. George chewed on his bottom lip, pulling the information Dream had told him and sticking them to the news Karl just delivered.

Putting me on the frontline after forging a letter just to get Salacia to fight by their side—fucking bastard.

“What the *fuck*.” Niki yelled, whirling around as she faced all of them. “My *mother*? My own fucking mother? What the hell?”

“That explains the forged letter.” George shook his head with slight disgust.

Karl’s brows knitted. “What? Who told you it was forged?”

“Prince...Clay.”

Quackity leaned forward as he urgently asked, “*When*?”

“*After* we bumped into you guys. Way after.”

“That fucking—”

“It’s not his fault.” Karl clicked his tongue. “We don’t need to go looking for more enemies right

now.”

It's not his fault, George thought. But was he just going to let his father do this? Get away with shit like killing the innocent, nearly killing Quackity with no regrets?

“His father *killed* Anthea—”

“And so did her mother.” Karl cut him off, pointing to Niki. “But we’re not going to hang Niki for it, are we?”

“My father can’t know.” George suddenly said, earning their attention. “Not until we’ve already figured something out. He already has too much on his plate.”

George couldn’t even fathom having to witness the surmounting stress this was going to cause him. He was still dealing with Anthea’s death, it was so clear in the way George would catch him lingering in her study, still.

George almost wanted to tell him that he could have the study, that he would find it more useful.

“What are we gonna figure out, exactly...?” Quackity trailed off before offering a shrug. “Because quite frankly, I’m ready to take what they stole from us.”

Their leader.

“We have to think about this.” Niki returned to them, slowly sitting down at the edge of the bed. “My mother and Sebastian—as much as I hate to admit it—are the most *powerful* people in our kingdom. We can’t just incite war.”

“I agree.” Karl leaned back onto the tall French windows, welcoming the cold on his back. “And...I feel like we’re gonna be pretty much fucked if we go against Euris *and* Vulcan. I mean...” He crossed his arms over his chest, closing his eyes. “...our warriors are good, but Fire and Air becoming one?”

“Shit.” Niki sighed.

“Your mother’s not going to let you fight with us,” George spoke, meriting their eyes as he set his on Niki. “Is she?”

When Niki shook her head ‘no’, the three young men glanced at each other; helplessness didn’t even begin to cover the sentiment that suddenly washed over them.



Felicity had dropped by to check in on them, informing Dream that Sapnap would be good to go in a couple of hours. In advising that he go home to fetch him a fresh set of clothes, Dream figured now would be a good time as any to finally face his father.

God knows the repressing urge to do so was eating him alive the longer he sat at Sapnap’s side.

It wasn’t until their shoulders bumped that Dream and George noticed each other going in opposite directions on the large wooden staircase.

Stumbling backwards in his step, Dream looked up at George, who shifted two steps up, looking at him with puffy eyes and sunken features. *You’ve been crying.* Dream’s heart dropped the longer he looked at him. *I’m sorry.*

Resting in a whisper between his lips, Dream said, “Hey.”

George looked at him for a moment before directing his eyes to the ground. “Hi.”

“How’s, um,” Dream cleared his throat, averting his gaze from him. *For once, it hurts to look at you.* “Quackity?”

“He’s awake.”

A sigh of relief escaped past his lips. Dream dared to look over and caught his eyes. They stared at each other for a moment. Nothing good or promising came from this, Dream could tell that much. *You’re back to being closed off, or at least pretending to be.*

Or maybe it’s because I know you now that the difference is almost the same.

“How are...how are you?” Dream asked, staggering eyes, unsteady tone.

George shrugged. *Yeah*, Dream blinked his stare away. *Nothing promising.*

“How’s Sappnap?” George asked through an empty tone.

Dream stirred in his footing. “Good...he’ll be out soon.” He glimpsed up at him. “He feels terrible.”

George turned his gaze to the side. “He was just following his orders.”

“He lost control.” Dream exasperatingly said. “I wasn’t there to stop him.”

“I wasn’t there to stop Quackity.” George’s voice broke down to whisper and that’s all it took to overthrow Dream’s self-control.

Stepping up on the staircase, Dream said, “George, last night—” But his words cut off when George took a step up, *a step back, a setback—between us.*

Nothing good. “Don’t.” *Nothing promising.* “Please.” There was a glint in George’s eye, just as discouraging as whatever was to come next from this interaction. “I can’t do this with you.”

Dream lowered his voice. “Do...what with me, George?”

George’s lips quivered as he shook his head. “I don’t wanna have to do it.” *But you have to?*

“Do what?”

“I don’t want to *deny* you, Dream.” Tears brimmed his eyes and Dream immediately stepped down. “So, don’t make me say it, okay?”

Dream wanted to remain composed so as to not progress the exact tears that threatened to spill out of George’s sullen eyes, but he couldn’t understand his thought process. He didn’t understand *what* George was saying, he just knew it meant nothing good. *Nothing promising.*

So, urgently, Dream said, “Look if this is about Nick and what he did, it wasn’t him, alright? It was my father, he—”

“But that’s exactly it, isn’t it?” George lolled his head to the side with a sigh. “It’s your father.” An exhale of desperation fled past Dream’s lips as he desisted all urgency. “He controls everyone. He controls *you*. And I know you’re nothing like him, but...” He drew in his bottom lip, blinking away his tears. “...you can’t say ‘no’ to him, Dream. You lie for him, you do everything he says—”

“I wouldn’t lie to *you*, though. I told you that last night—”

“It doesn’t matter. He’s got you under his control for as long as he’s around.” George winced. “I’m sorry, but I can’t—”

“George.” Dream’s fingers fastened themselves around George’s wrist, ceasing him in his spot.

“Don’t—”

“Did last night mean anything?” Dream looked up at him; hopeful eyes in a hopeless situation. “You can’t tell me that was nothing.”

George spoke through slightly gritted teeth, a tear rolled down his cheek. “It has to be.”

Dream tipped his head to the side, helplessness writing itself across his features as he brokenly whispered, “Don’t do this.”

George sucked in a shaky breath. “I can’t stand by someone who stands by Sebastian.”

“George—”

George tugged his wrist out of Dream’s grasp as if he was letting go of everything they had built up between them, furthermore when he bowed his head before he turned on his heel and quietly said, “Your Highness.”

Desisting all intimacy, inviting the coldness behind the code of conduct, leaving Dream in emptiness, as he did the very first night they spoke at Neptunalia, but this time—there wasn’t anything to gain, but rather, something to lose—*you*.

You.

Angel-face.

Atlas.

Tell me I didn’t lose you. George disappeared up the steps and down the hall. *I can’t lose you.*



Dream didn’t know what *really* losing control meant until he lost George. So, entering the Vulcan palace with either a suicide mission or an abundance of reasons to *kill*, Dream was blinded with irreversible rage.

And he couldn’t stop the scene he was going to create. Because he met George, fell for him, and lost him. His breaking point and his anchor.

“What the *fuck* did you do?” Dream’s voice boomed through the foyer of the palace the moment he spotted his father, mid-conversation with one of the warriors.

Sebastian lightly tapped the warrior’s shoulder, muttering something to him before they were left alone just as Dream reached him. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“*Me?* What the fuck do you think *you’re* doing?”

Sebastian stepped aside, nodding his head at the ajar doors. “Get in my office.” He went to reach for his son when he didn’t budge.

Dream shoved his shoulder against him as he walked past. “Don’t fucking touch me.”

It wasn’t that he was suddenly unafraid to act out, it was that he didn’t care about the repercussions. At his breaking point with no anchor, Dream feared nothing.

The door to Sebastian’s office shut the both of them in, Dream didn’t waste a second before continuing in his rampage. “Nick’s getting treated in Terra, by the way. Because he was severely wounded.”

Sebastian slowly shrugged as he stared blankly at him. “...Okay? Assuming it didn’t go well judging by your temper.”

“Oh, no. It went well.” Dream wasn’t sure what tone he’d possessed, something between hostility and apathy as he slowly walked towards him. “Not that you care. Seeing as you sent him, on his own, against Salacia’s best warrior.”

“I didn’t ask him to severely injure anyone,” Sebastian jutted his bottom lip with disdain. “That was all your best friend.”

“Because you *told him to*.” Dream yelled, inches away from his father’s face as the man rolled his neck back, looking away from his son. “You’re all talk with your bullshit of, ‘Oh, as my next in line you should take responsibility’—how about you take some *fucking* responsibility? How about *you* hold yourself accountable for the shit you put onto others?”

“Clay—”

“*You* sent Nick out there to do that. And you *knew* he’d listen. Everyone always *fucking* listens to you, you *fucking bastard*—”

“You need to keep your mouth shut if you know—”

“—‘what’s good for me’? *Fuck* you.” Dream spat.

Whatever indifference lay within Sebastian’s tone entirely disappeared as he squared his shoulders, levelling his eyes with his son. This time, Dream didn’t back down.

“I don’t know what the hell you think you’re doing,” Sebastian’s eyes flitted across his features. “But everything *I* do is for this realm. And if that stupid kid got in my office, he’d find something that could burn Vulcan down to its ashes. So, I would watch you say to me next.”

During Dream’s brief contemplation, Sebastian pushed past him, progressing into his office.

His father huffed, leaning against his desk. “If I hadn’t sent Nick out there, that kid would’ve gotten his hands on my battle plan against The Mind.”

Dream turned on his heel to face him. “Why does that matter?”

“Because in there states...” Sebastian rolled his eyes to the side. “...what Queen Victoria and I had planned.” Dream expectantly stared at him, his patience wearing thin. “Which was to kill Queen Anthea.”

Dream felt his world caving in on him and his first thought was *George—is that why you pushed me away?* His mouth fell agape at the floor as he began losing his sense of self.

I don’t blame you for not wanting this—us—me.

“Victoria and I wanted The Mind to be part of the ‘Elemental Kingdom’. The only way to do that was to make space for their territory. I needed to exclude one realm and I thought since we’re stronger as a four-element kingdom that one of us would have to inherit the powers of another realm. And it couldn’t be Terra because they’re our healers. So, Salacia had to go.”

Dream felt like the room was spinning with every word leaving his father’s mouth, felt the fire coursing through him with his father’s tone as he spoke vile things with indifference.

“So, naturally, I get rid of Queen Anthea. But she managed to ruin our good graces with The Mind by killing their leader, so that brings us to our plan with The Nether. I’d still have to get rid of Salacia’s bloodline, which leaves me with Anthea’s drug-addled son, but he’s not hard to get rid of so—”

The words were cut from Sebastian’s mouth in the second Dream’s fist connected with his jaw. The pain that rang past his already bruised knuckles momentarily drew his eyes to them.

Sebastian held his jaw, a devilish smirk growing as he juttied it back in place. “Mm,” He chuckled inwardly, glancing up at his son who stared at him in intermingling disbelief and rage. “There he is. My strongest warrior.”

“That’s why you pushed it forward, the battle against The Nether. And why...why you put George on the frontline.” Dream shook his head. “You *want* him gone.”

“Good to know your brain still works.” Sebastian sighed.

Dream scoffed bitterly. “You do realize you’ve fucked yourself over, right? He’s not gonna trust you when he finds out about this, let alone fight by your side against The Nether.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because you almost *killed his best friend*,” Dream’s voice resonated against the walls, causing a slight twitch in Sebastian’s movements as he went momentarily rigid.

A silence sheathed them, tense with Sebastian’s stare on his son as Dream recollected his breath.

Tears welling over his eyes, Dream’s voice shot out through a crack as he weakly pointed to himself, “You almost killed *my* best friend.”

Sebastian’s jaw set as he pushed himself off his desk, stopping in front of his son as he went to touch the band-aid over the cut from last night.

Dream shoved his hand away, breath ragged with his teeth clenched. “I told you not to *fucking* touch me.”

“I can’t believe this,” Sebastian breathed out a terse chuckle. “You’ve found a need for an anchor, haven’t you? Someone’s made you lose control.” He scoffed. “My own s...” He trailed off, mouth twitching shut at the remaining term on his tongue. “I don’t want you to see him anymore.” Sebastian turned around but got whirled back in his spot with Dream’s harsh grip on his shoulder.

“You don’t get to decide that—”

“Oh, I think I do.” Sebastian shoved off his hand. “He’s tainting your image. He’s making you *weak*.”

“I’m not letting you get away with this.”

“If you tell King George any of this, I can assure you the crown is no longer yours.”

Dream, once again, with the sole thing keeping that leash around him the tightest it could be, cutting the circulation of his breathing, defeatedly said, “You can’t take him away from me.”

Sebastian hummed with a smile. “Then I guess you’ll just have to base your relationship with him on a complete lie, won’t you?”

Dream watched him easily turn away, walking towards his chair with carelessness as if he hadn’t just caused the most irreparable damage to his son.

Taking a seat, Sebastian rolled his eyes with a sigh before glancing up at him. “What are you still doing here?”

Dream swallowed, no longer able to hold his tears back. “You know, for the longest time, I stood by you not because I wanted to guarantee my inheritance of the crown,” His brows pinched with his features as tears brimmed his eyes. “But because...because you’re my father.”

The moment *that* word left Dream’s mouth, Sebastian looked away from him. *Unaccepting of the truth, as always.*

“And I thought, no matter how harsh he is with me, deep down he still cares. *That’s* what kept me by your side.” Dream continued through a shaky whisper. “I loved you, dad.”

“That’s enough—”

“But you don’t know what that is.” A rivulet of tears streamed down his cheeks. “You couldn’t love mom, you don’t actually love Punz, and you *never* loved me.” He walked towards the desk, Sebastian leaned back in his chair. “I am your *son*, and some days you can’t even *bear* to look at me in the eyes.”

“Leave, Clay.”

“So forgive me if I go looking for love somewhere else.” *He won’t deny me.* Dream looked him up and down before turning away, watching the exit through blurry eyes before Sebastian spoke up, halting his steps.

“Fools.” Sebastian simply stated. “That’s what I think about those who go looking for love.”

Dream breathed out an indifferent laugh, turning around to glimpse at him. “I don’t give a *shit* what you think.”

When he left his father’s office, Dream should have felt completely hopeless, but he’d fought for something in there.

Even if it didn’t get him far with his father, it would help him get George back.

Because his father was a manipulative menace, an excellent one at that. And if the thing about the apple not falling too far from the tree still stood true, Dream was going to use the hereditary tactic he’d fought with for years of his life, to his advantage.

Because Sebastian thought George didn’t know. And maybe he didn’t. But he was going to. *I promised never to lie to you.* And Dream was going to make sure, that for once, he was one step ahead of his father.

And there was something so thrilling, and encouraging, in the way his father had barely laid a threatening grip on him—almost like he knew with his son out of control, he didn't stand a chance.

Am I stronger than you?

"He's making you weak," Sebastian had said.

But George had done the exact opposite.

And you know that. Dream smiled to himself. *And you're scared of it.*



With a comedown he couldn't shake, the feeling of a touch he'd grown addicted to, and the caught culprit behind the murder of his mother, George wanted nothing more than to get high instead of watching all of it slowly crumble down around him.

And there was something that he hated about *feeling* again. Like the indescribable pain that ran through him when he was so sure Quackity was gone for good.

And because he could still *feel* the burn of the alcohol. And he could still *feel his* touch, on his thigh, on his waist, he could *still* feel his lips on him, *the way it all burned so fucking good.*

Or the ache in his chest when he had no choice but to deny him. Because who would he be if he stood by him while he stood by his father? *I have to deny you until you deny him.*

"Woah, easy tiger." Karl's voice seeped past the ajar doors to the room Quackity was resting in.

George stepped in, eyes immediately locking with Sapnap who was being pushed away from Quackity by Karl.

George rolled his eyes. "The fuck is he doing here?"

"Just the guy I was looking for." Sapnap flailed his arms before pointing at Quackity. "Your guard's got a fucking attitude, by the way."

"Think you deserve that for nearly taking his life, but I could be wrong." George sarcastically replied before hooking his coat on a hanger.

"Fair point." Sapnap huffed. "Look, alright, I stepped in here to present my apologies—"

"Which I...didn't ask for." Quackity chimed in.

Sapnap bit back a remark, forcing himself to face George. "Your Majesty, I need to speak with you."

George glanced at Niki, silently asking for context.

"He...we might've let it slip. What we know about Sebastian and..." Niki trailed off when she received George's huff of annoyance.

"Not to point any fingers, but it was definitely Q." Karl shrugged, earning a light shove from the younger of the two.

"What more is there to discuss?" George asked, forcing indifference in his tone as he reluctantly glared at Sapnap.

“Dream.” Sapnap simply stated before the room fell silent.

Why can't I escape you? Why do I want him to elaborate? Why do I already miss you, just by hearing your name?

“Prince Clay, for y'all,” Sapnap added, overlooking the three of them.

“What about him?” George shrugged, once again feigning indifference when in reality, he wanted to ask, *is he okay? Did I hurt him?*

I didn't mean to.

“He didn't know, Your Majesty.” George had heard Sapnap act joyous, teasing, and angry, but this serious side of him urged him to listen.

“He's lied to me before.”

“Not about this. I swear to you.”

Another silence, George's gaze fell to the ground.

“Why should he believe you?” Quackity asked for George.

Sapnap half-turned to face them. “Look, bud, each and every one of us just got fucked over by Sebastian. I'm not making this shit up.”

Niki frowned. “You're still one of him.”

“I still serve him, yes. But you guys don't.” Sapnap looked at all of them individually. “You don't owe him anything. Do with that what you will.”

“Say we do have a plan,” Quackity spoke up, earning his friends' attention, which he wholly ignored. “We're not letting you in on it.”

Sapnap clicked his tongue, rolling his head back. “Man, I don't care what you do. Just make sure it's good enough to kill him.”

“That's bold of you to say.” George furrowed his eyebrows, eyeing him carefully. “He's your best friend's father.”

Sapnap chuckled inwardly. “Oh, trust me, he'd want the same.”

Something that should have been unconvincing slid off Sapnap's tongue with so much ease, George was momentarily stunned. *Because that wasn't true.* Sapnap looked at him weirdly, like his words shouldn't have shocked him. *Was it?*

“You do know...he was considering it, right?” Sapnap reeled his stare onto him, George blinked at him. “Can I speak with you in private?”

“I think the fuck not—”

“Sure.” George cut Quackity off.

“George...” Karl warningly said.

“We'll be right outside,” George assured before shutting the door behind worried expressions and

immediately cornering Sapnap. “Cut the shit. Did he know?”

“He *didn't*.” Sapnap pressed.

George sighed, leaning his shoulder into the door. “I don’t know if I believe you.”

“King George,” Sapnap began, taking in a deep breath. “Quite frankly, I don’t owe you shit. I don’t give a fuck if you’re a king, a prince—I don’t owe you shit. I don’t *care* about you.” George pushed down a smile, *he could kind of understand Dream’s appeal to him*. “But I care about Dream. He’s like a brother to me. So, I’ll say this for him—Sebastian takes and *takes*, and Dream just *gives* and gets *nothing* in return—and don’t get me wrong,” He lifted a hand. “I’m not asking for your pity, and I can assure you Dream doesn’t want it either.”

I know, George wanted to say.

“Everything that’s fucked up with this place starts with him, as I’m sure you know.” Sapnap sized him. “And Dream has no choice but to stick by his side because he wants to assure that the crown will fall into his hands and not his brother’s, ‘cause *that* guy’s a fucking moron.” He rolled his shoulders back with a sigh. “Look, Sebastian has been pushing Dream closer and closer to the edge for nearly every day of his life. And if Dream had known about Queen Anthea’s—” George shot him a look and Sapnap decided to let the sentence ring out in recency knowledge. “—if he had known, it would’ve been his last straw.” He breathed out before leaning into his words. “He. Didn’t. Know.”

George shook his head defiantly because maybe if he continued to convince himself that he’d done right by pushing Dream away, he could repress this growing remorse that began surfacing with every word spoken by Sapnap.

“Don’t...um,” Sapnap glanced down at the ground, George watched him through a floored gaze. “Don’t tell him we had this conversation, but, um.” He cleared his throat, pocketing his hands in his puffer jacket. “Dream likes you a lot, Your Majesty.” His eyes studied the floor, George studied him for any sign of fallacy, but to no avail—just the best friend of a broken soul that hurt his own, just as it did George’s. “In fact, I think he likes you so much, he would drill himself into the fucking ground to make sure you come out of that battle untouched.”

I know, George’s eyes fluttered shut.

“I just want you to see that he can’t keep being blamed for the person that his father is.”

“I know that.” George finally breathed out, exasperated from repressing so much of everything that begged to surface through the duration of this conversation.

“Then talk to him.” Sapnap sounded almost angry, a piece of defeat from Dream showing itself in his tone. “Don’t...give up on—he—you really can’t tell him we had this conversation, but...he needs you, okay? You’re, like, for some dumb reason,” He rolled his eyes. “You’re the only one that can...save him. And he’s been saving you this entire fucking time, so.” He untucked a hand to lightly flail it at George.

George sniffled, crossing his arms over his chest. “I never said I needed saving.” *But I do*.

“But you do.” Sapnap shot back. “So don’t let Sebastian’s interference blind you from seeing that you guys are obviously...helping...each other.” He almost turned around to leave but stopped mid-walk to add, “I’m tired of...of watching him lose the people he loves because his father’s a fucking idiot.” before he left down the hallway.

“You took care of me,”

And how was George going to silently offer the safety of his hold to a broken, honeyed-voice soul, only to rip it away from him on the basis of something he cannot be blamed for? And what *if* Sapnap was telling the truth about the willingness to get rid of Sebastian?

Why don't I want to believe it until I hear it from you, Dream?

“You're a good person, George.”

George walked back into the room, head overflowing with thoughts. He caught Quackity's and Karl's looks before his eyes fell onto Niki. *We didn't have to think twice about you because you're our best friend*, Niki smiled softly at him. *And because you're a good person.*

“What'd he say?” Quackity asked.

“You're the only one that can save him.”

George shrugged with a lop-sided smile. “Nothing I didn't already know.”



The night Quackity was being brought back to Salacia, George sat on the large marbled staircase of the palace. Thoughts to himself with his knees to his chest as he watched the leaves roll with the brisk air in the dimly lit courtyard.

George glimpsed at the column to his right. *Neptunalia*—their conversation: Dream had obviously been avoiding the festival because his father was inside. He remembered Dream's glare, his clenched fist, all while George was slow-dancing with Karl, witnessing what he came to know as the most toxic father-son relationship in this Kingdom. *Now, I know. I had miscalculated.*

An arm was draped around him, sneaking him out of his thoughts; George leaned into the familiar scent of Karl with ease before resting his head on his shoulder.

“How are we feeling, handsome?” Karl spoke against his hair.

George placed one hand over Karl's knee, drawing mindless things with the tip of his finger as he said, “Alright, I think.”

“Yeah?” Karl dipped his head down slightly, breath expanding onto his forehead. “I don't need to lock the cabinets in my atelier?”

George's eyelids flapped shut. “Fuck. Karl, I am so sorry—”

“It's okay, it's alright.” Karl giggled softly. “We don't expect you to just miraculously quit, George. And given everything that's happened, I'd say you sobered up for an impressive amount of time, you know?”

George shook his head. “Before I crashed again.”

“And the chances of that happening again are gonna lessen and lessen until it won't happen anymore,” Karl said with so much faith it almost soothed all of his worries.

Almost. Because there was still Sapnap's voice nagging him in the back of his head. And there was still the absence of that burning warmth he suddenly craved.

“So, um.” Karl cleared his throat, fidgeting with something in his pocket before he pulled out a familiar envelope.

George’s eyes widened. “Where did you find this?” He grabbed his mother’s letter from his grasp.

“You dropped it in the atelier,” Karl mumbled.

George pulled away, Karl retracted his arm from around him. “You haven’t...read it, have you?”

Karl chuckled, shaking his head. “Well,” He caught George’s look and broke into another laugh. “I may have held it up against the light, *but* the second I noticed Anthea’s writing, I tucked it back in my pocket.”

George nodded, drawing in his bottom lip as his eyes drew over the letter.

“Have you?” Karl asked before quietly adding, “Read it.”

George sighed. “I’m too scared to.”

“Can’t be anything too bad, right?” Karl shrugged. “If it’s of any help, I saw Alex’s name in there.”

George chuckled. “Are you saying she wrote this for him instead of me?”

Karl smirked. “He was her favourite child, so...” George rolled his eyes as he laughed breathlessly, “...kidding.” He added with a cheeky smile.

“Thanks, by the way.” George pocketed the letter.

“I wasn’t gonna go through your shit, George.” Karl scoffed lightly.

“No, not for that.” George glimpsed up at him. “For Quackity. For...bringing him back.”

“Anything for Q.” Karl smiled softly at him, lightly bumping his head with his. “So...I need to ask you something.”

George side-eyed him. “Oh *god*, what?”

“I think you know what,” Karl asked through an unstoppable smile, causing George to push down his own. “I walk in my atelier, freaking the fuck out, and I catch you and Prince Cl—”

“Stop, stop, stop, oh my—” George covered his face with his hands. “—please. Stop.”

“You *like* him,” Karl spoke through a grin, George didn’t have to look to know.

“As a friend, yes.” George huffed, dropping his hands from his face.

“Now, as your friend, we *have* kissed, but I didn’t have you up on the counter like—”

“*Karl*. I am going to fucking kill you.” George harshly bumped his side into his. “Shut the fuck up.”

Karl giggled to himself, allowing George time to recuperate from the flustered mess he left him in.

“Don’t tell...Quackity yet. It’s fine if Niki knows, but...” George kept his eyes on his lap, fiddling with the hem of his shirt. “...I think I do like him.”

“Why...does that not sound like a good thing?” Karl searched for his eyes past his flopped hair.

“Because of his father.” George glanced at him. “I feel like...I can’t trust him as long as his father’s around. As long as he’ll allow him to be around.”

Karl pursed his lips with a curt nod. “Do you think Nick meant it? When he said Prince Clay would...kill...Sebastian?”

“Sometimes, um,” George chuckled, feeling warmth rise in the balls of his cheeks, “He’ll...say things to me, and I don’t know if I’m being blinded by bias, but...I believe him, Karl.”

George thought of kind eyes and nervous smiles, *I just need to hear you say it.*

Karl’s smile beamed in his features. “George,” He nudged him. “You’ve always had a good eye for genuine people, so...you’re probably right to believe him.”

George began an admittance, finding himself unable to keep this one thing to himself. “We bumped into each other earlier and...I told him I couldn’t see him anymore because of what his father did...fuck, it hurt so much doing that, Karl.”

Karl frowned, locking his arm with him.

“I, like...I fucking *miss* him.”

For someone who was unable to get these sorts of feelings out, George suddenly found himself unable to stop. And maybe it was the comfort that Karl brought him, the understanding nature he possessed.

Until Karl didn’t say anything, which momentarily worried him until he met his eyes, which were directed to the left of him. “Well,” He nodded his head behind George. “Looks like someone missed you, too.”

George paused on his countenance for a second until he half-turned in his seat. And he could’ve sworn his heart leapt out of his chest as he locked eyes with Dream.

Karl squeezed his arm before unlocking his with George, standing up from the steps. “Your Highness,” He beckoned at Dream before glancing down at George. “I’ll leave the two of you. Good thing there are no counters around, am I right—”

George grabbed his ankle. “You say that shit one more time, I *will* break your face.”

Karl pouted, “But you love my face.”

George broke into a grin, shaking his head. “Get out.”

Something about anchors that George had come to learn was that it didn’t only come in help during the application of powers. Because the moment the palace doors shut behind his friend, George’s heart was racing at an obscure rate.

He stood up slowly, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground as he descended the last steps.

He didn’t know why he was even moving, where he was gravitating towards, but the *moment* Dream spoke, “Your Majesty—” George looked up at him, urging his steps as he shook his head, features scrunched as he couldn’t stop the growing tears.

“Don’t ever call me that again.” George lurched at him, draping his arms over his shoulders, dropping all of his weight into Dream’s hold; the very one that gave him that blind trust to *let go*.

It was bone-crushing, it squeezed the air from his lungs, and it liberated George from whatever hell he'd been battling through since last night. In Dream's embrace, strong arms tightening around his waist, George felt whole in his warmth.

George sighed into the curve of his neck, clinging onto him as if every 'sorry' he wanted to express was exuded in their space. "Fuck," *Somehow* there was more of him to hug, *somehow*, though they were as close as they could get, they outstretched their hold. "Dream," He laced his fingers through his hair. "I missed you."

Dream relaxed in the space of his arms. "God, I missed you, too." A trembled whisper against George's neck.

People would think it *ridiculous*—for it being mere hours since they saw each other last. But from passing each other by for *years* of their existence in this Kingdom, they were finally in agreement, they were in unison—no things left unsaid, no self-restraints.

"Do you know what he did?" Dream asked after a while.

Pulling away only slightly, Dream's arm still coiled around his waist, George's own slung over his shoulders, he said, "Your father?"

Dream's eyes were glossed over as he nodded.

"Yeah," George's voice came through a split whisper. "I know."

Dream swallowed, eyes flitting across his features. "I swear I didn't. Not until after we—"

"I know that, too." George's lips cracked into a lop-sided smile. "He told me not to say anything, but...Sapnap had a chat with me." His smile progressed with Dream's own.

"Sap—*when*?" A giggle burst past his lips, George wanted to savour the sound for a little longer.

"Couple hours ago?" George shrugged, a grin breaking through his face as Dream huffed out a terse laugh before pulling him back into his embrace.

A breeze rolled past and George could have sworn it shaped over a silhouette, one he recognized. Untucking his chin from the space of Dream's neck, he rested it onto his shoulder, remaining in his embrace as he looked over his arm at what he envisioned as *his* demon.

And maybe it was a lingering high, but he could have sworn it spoke words to him—almost like a send-off. *This doesn't feel as exhilarating as it should*, George thought as he stared into nothingness, an image only his brain concocted, *this was bittersweet*.

Because no matter how toxic his relationship with the dark entity in his mind was, it brought him comfort that no one else could—the familiarity in that darkness where he crashed and fell in a spiral of psychedelics and liquor. *But you're bidding me farewell. You let go of me and I let go of you, with much grief*.

George could almost hear him say, 'We know it's for the better'. Almost like *he* knew the care that rested between the arms George was currently caged in would treat him much better. And George wanted to say, *Dream had, for a while—unknowingly, but he was, and he would continue to do so*.

"George?" Dream spoke against his shoulder, George hummed before blinking away from where he'd seen the ghost of his best friend. "I want to help you get revenge on my father."

George stiffened in his embrace before imperceptibly pulling away. “Dream, he’s...he’s your father.”

Dream’s gaze narrowed onto him. “And he killed your mother. He almost killed Sapnap. And now he’s trying to kill you.” The last statement was spoken through a strained voice as if it hurt him to admit.

George tilted his head to the side with a sigh. “...Dream—”

“So, I’m going to help you kill him. Or whatever you decide to do—I’m all in.” Dream leaned his forehead against George’s. “I’m ready to lose everything before I lose you.” He whispered, nudging the tips of their noses. “I can’t lose you. I need you—”

George stole the words from his lips, meeting them with urgency, desperation and ardour. Dream didn’t react until a few seconds after, working his lips against George’s. Their hands soothed over their shoulders, necks, arms.

At the moment in which their mouths worked in tandem with every self-restraint from their night in the atelier, George thought, *I want more, I want to taste more of you, the honey that drips from your tone*, he expanded Dream’s lips with his own, their tongues overlapped in suppressed hunger and greed, *the kindness that lives on your palette*.

George momentarily broke away, lips brushing as he deliberately admitted, “I need you, too.” *He swears he sees him shut his eyes with a relieved exhale, as if he yearned to hear those exact words*, “I need you—” Re-engaging in fulfilling their desires, George revelled in the squeeze at his waist, relinquished in the softness of Dream’s hair in the space between his fingers.

I can feel all of you again,

Dream pulled him in closer, desisting their moving lips to sigh pleurably into George’s mouth,

And out of all the ones I’ve experienced, you are my best high.

Chapter End Notes

hiii.

quick little thank u to [the beloved](#) for ur impeccable music taste 'cause it named 3 chapters now & the beta reading, ofcofc.

the next update might take longer than a week, or it might be a week exact. it's finals season so can't be too sure.

thank u for the nice, treat yourselves really fucking good, as always. till' the next one x
(:

Angel of Small Death

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



“I need you, too.”

Four words that exonerated every bad thing that took place since they left the atelier in Terra. Four words that reassured him of everything he doubted, everything he was afraid of. Four words spoken from someone who he *never*, for a second since they met, thought it plausible in reciprocation.

But George did say it—with the feel of his lips, the taste of him on his tongue followed by *those four words*. The way George held him as he had in his mother’s study, held him the way he had in the Vulcan ballroom, but this time, with *those four words*.

George would just do and never say anything before or after, but he had this time.

Ghosting his lips from Dream’s own to the column of his throat, George mumbled. “You going back home tonight?”

Dream leaned his chin in the nest of his curls. “I probably should.”

“Can you stay?”

Dream smiled against his hair. “Would you like me to?”

George sighed, resting his forehead on Dream’s collarbone to say, “I just...don’t want you to go back to him.”

Dream wanted to say, *if I could stay with you and never go back to him, I would*, but opted for, “I’d love to stay, George.”

A smile beamed through George’s features, which he hid from Dream by rolling his eyes before pulling away. He interlaced their fingers, something that struck natural for George, it seemed. Dream was *not* complaining.

They entered the palace, he allowed George to guide him; cheeks red and warm from just looking at their interlocked hands as they went up the steps.

George let go of his hand to shut the door behind them as Dream progressed awkwardly into the room. “Look familiar?” He teasingly asked.

Dream grinned. “Little hazy, but.”

George chuckled and Dream’s heart warmed at the sound: with a sense of pride for being the cause of it and a ludicrous amount of adoration for *him*.

A silence passed them; one that Dream barely acknowledged as his head brimmed with apologies, things he always felt he had to deliver with his link to his father. Especially with George having practically given him a second chance, *believing* him with no proof behind the statement of offering a helping hand to avenge Queen Anthea.

With the pent-up stress from last night's and today's events, Dream exasperatingly said, "God, George, I'm so sorry." His back still to George, eyes shut and refusing to face him in a moment of defeat.

Another *excruciating* silence followed.

"For what?" George's voice was as quiet as the room.

Dream winced, head slumped with his shoulders. "For what my father did."

The silence filled itself with the creaking of the floorboards followed by footsteps: *George's*. Two refined arms snaked themselves around Dream's torso, causing his eyes to briefly open at the touch. Glancing down, he watched George's hand slide up his clothed chest to rest where his heart thumped in his chest.

Dream sighed, placing his hand above George's. "I'm sorry."

George rested his head against his shoulder blade, lips moving against the muscle as he said, "Dream..." He had a new cadence when saying his name lately, almost purposefully leaving out the vowels, sounding out the consonants, as if he were saying it in his sleep: *easy, habitual, second nature*. "...if you start apologizing for all the bad things your father has done, I fear you'll begin to lose your voice."

Dream drank in the words as it tasted of validation for years of what felt like nullified sufferings.

He turned around in the space of George's arms which slightly loosened around him and the two of them locked eyes. George smiled softly up at him, drawing his hands from the back of his puffer jacket to clutch the front.

Gently cradling his face and brushing the pad of his thumbs over George's cheekbones, Dream half-smiled. "Thank you." He whispered, not audibly sounding it out as he knew George would reject it.

And he had.

George imperceptibly shook his head before he said, "What happened?" Dream's brows knitted, the course of his thumbs stopping at the side of his temples, George brought one hand to cover Dream's own, caressing his knuckles. "They're more bruised than I remember them being when I bumped into you earlier," Dream tautened a breath, eyes veering to George's other hand which tightly clutched onto his jacket. "On...on the staircase. In Terra."

"I, uh..." His eyebrows pinched together, feeling an ache in his throat as he continued to avoid eye contact. "...stood up...for myself?" An uneasy chuckle brushed past his lips. "Didn't really end well, though, so." He offered a meek shrug before hesitantly meeting his gaze.

George half-frowned. "What'd you mean...by that?"

Dream narrowed his eyes onto him before he looked over his head, taking in a deep breath. "I thought by calling him my father, something I haven't done in years, or—" He glimpsed down at him. "—ever, really—um—I thought it would change the way he looks at me?" George's gaze fell ahead, directed at Dream's chest as he continued to listen to stinging words. "It didn't—he...still looks at me the same way."

George sighed, dismissing the vileness he tasted off of Dream's statement. "How does he look at you?"

“Like he isn’t.” Dream replied, almost as if it was the easiest hardest thing to admit. “At all.”

“Dream...” George’s eyes fluttered shut, returning his hand to clutch the fabric of Dream’s jacket, pulling him. “...did he lay a hand on you?”

Dream furrowed his eyebrows. “No.”

George twisted the fabric in his palm before looking up at him, Dream’s heart ached at the returning gloss in his eyes that resembled the one on the steps of the Terran palace. “You can tell me—”

“He didn’t—he didn’t,” Dream ushered, caressing his thumb over his cheek as he searched for his eyes. “I swear to you he didn’t.” Finally looking at him, George released the fisted jacket and slid his hands up to Dream’s chest; where he should’ve felt the cold hands of a Salacian royal, but instead felt comforting warmth, which *maybe* was the sole reason behind what flew out of his mouth next as Dream brainlessly admitted, “But I kinda wish he did.”

George froze in his spot. “What?”

That familiar ache in his throat returned from having to push down insuppressible tears. “Because then I’d know...” He swallowed what felt like needles prickling his throat, and eyes, it seemed, as he blinked up at the ceiling. “...then I’d know that he actually *felt* something, you know?” He winced, forcing himself to look at George. “That he felt...*anything*...while I was...pouring my fucking heart out to him. Instead, he just looked at me like—” He shook his head, averting his gaze. “—*fuck*. Sorry.” His hands left George’s face to cover his own.

Fuck. Tears began spilling out before he could refrain himself. *Not here, not right now*.

“It’s okay—it’s...” Two hands wrapped themselves around his forearms and Dream felt the light tug, but he couldn’t look at him—not in the state he was in. “...Dream, it’s okay.”

A defiant shake of his head. *Maybe if he didn’t speak, he wouldn’t know what hid behind his hands*. Until drops slipped past them as he felt the saltiness against his lips.

George succeeded in freeing him from his cover-up, but Dream blinked his eyes away from him through the blurriness in which he briefly caught them. He could feel George’s hands cupping his face gently, to which he immediately shut his eyes.

A noiseless, “*Fuck*.” susurrated past Dream’s lips. *Fuck, dude, pull yourself together*. “I can’t stop it,” *Stop fucking crying*. He sniffled, returning his hands to cover his face, voice muffling itself against his teary palms as he said, “I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

His heart was *beating* out of his chest and Dream swore he’d never cried this much before, never been able to not stop the incessant tears.

“Nothing’s wro...” George trailed off before once again pulling Dream’s hands from his face, “...*shh*,” Hushed and patient, delicate fingers soothed through his hair.

Their foreheads knocked, Dream’s unsteady breathing wavered in their proximity. George cradled the side of his face with one hand before he rested his cheek against Dream’s tear-stained one.

Dream felt like he had been *sinking and sinking* ever since he’d entered his father’s study, but with every graze of George’s fingernails against his scalp, he was getting closer and closer to the surface.

And for a moment, Dream felt like he could push down his tears. Like he could stop them as he was taught to because “*crying is stupid*” and *you look fucking dumb*.

Until George pressed a lingering kiss on his cheek, waiting a moment before he transposed it onto his temple, causing Dream to almost whimper at the tenderness before his arms wrapped tightly around his waist, pulling George in because he craved to feel the coolness of his being.

“Shh, shh, shh...” George whispered against his forehead before pressing a chaste kiss onto it, bringing his lips to where another tear slipped from Dream’s eye, one he could’ve sworn George purposely caught as he pressed his lips against it.

Maybe it was the growing fire within him, the one that was raising his temperature, the one that caused him to squeeze the air from George’s lungs as he tightened his grip around him, but Dream dared himself to breathe out, “Please, make it stop.” *Make it quiet again. “...please...”* Feeling like the flames torched him, he brokenly whispered through gritted teeth, *my anchor*, clutching onto the fabric of George’s sweater.

George leaned his head against Dream’s, speaking softly into his ear. “How?” He caressed his hair once more, ushering out, yet in the most subtle sense, “Tell me,” He leaned his head away from him slightly, curving a hand around his cheek, looking for his eyes. “How can I make it better?”

Dream, with everything within him aflame, and all of the noise becoming a little *too* much, crashed his lips onto George’s—not as urgent, but just as desperate, allowing it to linger, savouring every bit of coolness, swimming in his element. George leaned into it, wrapping his arms around his shoulders before progressing the kiss when he pressed himself against Dream.

Dream clutched onto him, just as he had in the atelier. He almost felt selfish, for taking so much, but George felt so fucking good in his hold—a pacifying wave rushing through him with every lasting, anguished caress.

He moved his hands to grip George’s waist, walking them back towards the bed, mind on auto-pilot, hunger driving each and every step and action. He would have stopped, he would’ve forced himself to stop if George hadn’t turned them around, causing Dream’s calves to knock against the mattress.

George fisted his shirt, breaking their kiss as he spoke against Dream’s chasing lips. “Dream, are you sure?”

“Only if you are.” Dream uttered.

George nodded almost instantly, hands quick to divest of Dream’s jacket before tossing it to the floor. “I am.” His fingers halted at the hem of Dream’s shirt, awaiting his approval.

Dream, at that moment, had lost all control. Control over the sense of his emotions as he found himself smirking against George’s lips when he’d just been crying seconds ago. Sadness turned into anger which turned into lust and he couldn’t process any of it.

In fact, Dream hadn’t been able to recognize himself the moment he left his father’s office—the moment he realized that he didn’t have to follow his father’s rules anymore, to be the person he wanted him to be.

In other words, Dream was completely off his hinges and something about being around George in his moment of self-alienation pushed him to do *whatever* he desired. And his desire stood right in front of him, willing in his offerings to shut all the noise out, to switch his brain off.

Dream pulled his shirt over his head, returning his gaze to George's reeling stare over his bare chest. His small hands felt for every inch of his skin—and Dream was going absolutely *fucking insane* watching him in awe, *feeling* his raw touch against him.

Tracing the tattoo on Dream's lower abdomen, lip captured between his teeth, George uttered out a quiet, "Fuck."

Dream cupped the side of his face, giving it a small jerk up so George could look at him. "You with me?" Almost teasing—*unrecognizable*.

Just as urgent as his previous statement, George ushered out, "I am." Before crashing his lips against his Dream's, his hands at the clasp of his training pants, "I am," He repeated against the kiss as he tugged the fabric down. "I'm with you—" Dream brought his free hand to grip the back of George's head, pressing his lips onto his, drinking in every carnal drop that fuelled his touch.

The very touch that urged George to momentarily tear his hands from Dream's briefs, so he could take his sweater off, followed by his slacks as Dream continued to pepper kisses from his lips down to his neck. He was so lost in tasting all of him that he hadn't noticed the pace at which they were moving until he felt George wrap his fingers around his cock.

He gripped his hair and involuntarily bit down on his neck, his stomach clenched.

George stifled his moan, whispering into his ear, "Am I making it better?" He stroked gently, coaxing in the most taunting sense.

Dream sucked the bitten skin between his lips before he replied through a ragged breath, "Yes—fuck. So much better."

George's strokes were lethargic and derisive, augmenting the embers of Dream's soul.

"Getting a condom," George mumbled against his jaw before stepping away entirely, only for Dream to grab him by the wrist, unthinkably—*nothing was going through his brain*.

Dream couldn't come down from where George's touch had elevated him, so he grabbed him by the waist by the time George had already reached the drawer next to the bed. George giggled as his back was pressed up against his chest, urging a smile onto Dream's lips as he continued to kiss on his neck—a spot he felt magnetized to ever since knowing the feel of it against his mouth.

Dream slipped one hand from his own barricading arms to slide down George's stomach while George slid open the drawer. Slipping a hand past the band of his briefs had George rolling his head back onto Dream's shoulder, allowing more space for Dream to deliver his kisses, encouraging the hand that began the strokes he had felt on himself seconds ago.

"You're just..." George breathily moaned before lightly nudging his elbow into Dream's chest, pushing him off only so he could turn around and wrap his arms around his shoulders. "...so persistent, aren't you?" He stole the dwelling words on Dream's tongue by slipping his own into the voracious kiss, pushing himself onto Dream as he sent the both of them onto the bed.

Dream realized he was blacking out in certain moments when one thing would lead to another and they were suddenly raw and dirty in their lewd engagement on this royal mattress.

One thing led to another and Dream could feel the hot flashes that pumped his system, making him blind to how he'd gotten to the point of feeling the sweat off of himself, and off of the dimples at George's back from where his wrist lay to where his hand was tight around his ass.

One thing led to another and George was a moaning mess, his fingernails scraping down Dream's shoulder blades as if he was in pain—and a quelled part of Dream—his morals and everything related to that fucking code of conduct—*knew* the reason behind the pain.

The reason behind the junctures in which he blacked out spoke for how overheated he was, his innate fire growing and growing and latching onto George to extinguish itself through the coolness *his* innate element possessed.

It was when he could feel the rise in the pit of his stomach pressing above that he momentarily snapped out of it, George seemed to have locked back into it as well when their foreheads knocked.

Ragged and unsteady breaths hitched in between their mouths as they sloppily kissed in increments, missing each other's lips, their grips tightening around each other as they peaked at the same time, simultaneously snatching their high as if their lives depended on it.

George clutched onto Dream's hair, a gasp and half-whimper followed by his writhing thighs around Dream's waist. Sheen-white innocence spewed onto Dream's stomach as he drawled out his moan against the curve of George's neck.

There was an involuntary roll of George's hips against his, which progressed for a little longer, Dream couldn't help but fall into it.

Coming down from his high, Dream *spotted* the burns, the effects that followed his loss of control—*I burned you*. He felt George shift against him with another broken whimper. *I hurt you*.



Dream was unhinged and George was thriving off of it. Dream had a devilish smile while sporting tear-stained cheeks and the sight *fucking titillated* him.

And when they were in the shower, comfortable and somewhat pensive silence accompanied by cascading water, George realized that he may have a problem.

Or, deep down he knew, but that night had fished out a reminder.

He could deny all attestations and say that with the fixed effort of giving up on alcohol and drugs, he was going to be rid of his problems—but he was an addict.

And if he couldn't have drugs and alcohol, he would revert back to sex. Something that burnt his soul in the similar parts where traces of liquor and smoked herbs lingered—scorched themselves onto his being.

George has only had sex when he was wasted, never sober; being sober was a task in itself because he felt like he wasn't as confident. But that wasn't true.

The reason behind his nervousness was the pretty blonde prince whose hips he straddled, whose lips electrified his own, *whose hands felt so fucking good where they firmly gripped his waist*.

In all honesty, the only thing that reassured George to be as obscene as he was with him was because of the way Dream looked at him when he'd stripped himself of his clothes; a look drenched in awe, pretty parted lips and softened green eyes following every inch of his skin in disbelief.

If George had known that all it took for Dream to act fearlessly confident was reciprocation, he

would have given it to him a long time ago. Because there were moments in which Dream *stole all senses from him*. Most specifically when he squeezed his thighs so hard, George felt like it burned.

And it had. Whenever George's eyes would aimlessly glimpse where his skin stung, he'd notice crimson red marks: the balls of Dream's palm, as well as his fingers, impressed on his skin. *And he wanted more of it.*

Maybe it was selfish, or maybe it was something they both wanted but didn't have the courage to admit.

And maybe George had a problem. And maybe he was addicted to catching a high. And maybe, in letting his demon go, he knew exactly whose arms he'd be pulled into, and what he'd receive from them—what Dream would do to his soul—the precise spot that had been untouched, that couldn't be breached with the excess amount of alcohol or drugs.

The precise spot that could only burn under someone's touch.

And whose touch would that be if not Dream's?

There was this thing about the uncharted part of his soul that was now being conquered, with every guidance of Dream's hands on his waist, taking complete control in a circle of fire—George had never known a high like this.

It built up, it burnt him, it swallowed him whole, this gushing blaze—and George *chased* it, caught it, and rode it out with Dream.

George *thought* he knew Dream was his best high, but now he was certain. A touch that burned the unburnt side of his soul; the side that contained the liberation from the chains that weighed him down in purgatory, where he roamed like a ghost for so many years of his life.



George woke up to an empty spot beside him.

There *was* a small hint of panic that rushed through him, something he hadn't felt with any of his one-night stands—ones he'd in fact asked to leave after sex.

But then he caught Dream hunched over slightly where he sat at the edge of the bed, sporting the reddish marks George left on his back.

George shuffled underneath the covers before carefully wrapping his arms around his shoulders, earning a small jolt of surprise from Dream, who looked over his shoulder, his sigh expanding onto George's curved lips when he rested his chin on his shoulder.

"Hey." Spoken through a warm whisper which expanded onto George's lips.

George smiled softly at him before whispering back, "Hi."

Dream initiated the kiss, but the second George leaned into it, Dream pulled away.

Furrowing his eyebrows, George glimpsed at his lap before returning his gaze to Dream's side profile. "...You okay?" The nod came quickly, but when George went in for another kiss, Dream didn't fall into it.

At all.

George's arms loosened around him before they were completely off, hands digging into the mattress. "What's wrong?" He sized him, leaning his weight onto his palms.

Surely he wasn't regretting it.

Right? George narrowed his eyes onto him, Dream remained silent. "Dream—"

"I hurt you." Dream deadpanned.

As he shifted his gaze to the bedsheets, George noticed the burn marks on his waist staring back at him. *Oh.*

"I understand if you want me to leave—"

"What?" George instantly looked at him. "Why would I want you to do that?"

The confusion encompassed both of them now.

"Why? George, I *burned* you."

George looked at him, unmoved. "...Yeah? And?"

Dream's lips parted. "How do you still want to be around me after that?"

George stared for a second longer until a smile cracked at his lips, Dream was entirely perplexed.

A breathless laugh was directed at his lap, one George wasn't able to hold back.

"What?"

He bit his bottom lip to maintain his composure until he caught Dream's puzzlement, but when they lingered in each other's gaze, it had progressed into an uneasy smile for the blonde.

"*What* are you laughing at?" Dream nervously chuckled.

"You, actually." George snickered, shifting all his weight onto one palm.

Dream halted his laugh, though his smile was still apparent, but fading. "George."

George was going to reassure him at that moment, dismiss his worry as he fretted for absolutely nothing. But in a strange way, he thought, *wouldn't directly going into an explanation validate a need for one?*

George wanted to make it seem as if everything *should* be fine, and because everything *was* fine. So, instead of going into an extensive, emotion-heavy explanation that neither of them was ready to handle, just yet, he figured they should get some food in their systems.

He knew for a fact, following last night's events, that neither of them had anything to eat. And George wasn't good at this 'verbal comfort thing', as he's come to know—but he's been taught, indirectly, through Karl.

So, tending a hand out towards Dream, George sighed out, "Let's get something to eat."

"What—" Before Dream could get his words out, George was already slipping out of bed.

Purposely grabbing Dream's shirt instead of his own, in hopes to play into things that would

silently assure Dream that he wanted him *here*.

I'm wearing your shirt so you can't leave without it because I don't want you to leave—I want you here. I'm asking you to eat with me—here. I want you right here.

George glimpsed down at how the hem of Dream's shirt reached the middle of his thigh. Glancing over at Dream to catch his stare, George knew they were thinking the exact same thing.

"You gonna put something on?" George cocked an eyebrow, eyes already searching for Dream's training pants before he quickly snatched them from the ground to toss them at him.

Dream caught it mid-air, despite his eyes being fixed on George's frame. He only slightly looked away to pull his pants on, but his gaze kept returning to George, who waited patiently, one hand on the doorknob.

When Dream turned the corner of the bed, his upper half still amiss a shirt, George wrapped his fingers around his wrist. He smiled to himself when he saw the brief shock in Dream's face when the door had been swung open, causing the blonde to quickly swoop up his puffer jacket from the ground as he shrugged it on, unzipped.

"It's, like, two in the morning, George." An amused smile danced on George's lips while Dream followed behind him, attempting to get his attention in quiet whispers. "Isn't everyone asleep?"

"How does that concern us?" George asked over his shoulder, continuing down the hall.

George flicked the switch, illuminating the kitchen as they stepped in before directly making his way towards the fridge and pulling out a box of eggs.

Sliding it over the counter as he reached Dream's side, George looked up at him. "Can you make us your stupid omelet again?" He broke into a grin when Dream's eyebrows shot up, a smile growing on his lips. "Pretty please?"

That very smile beamed through his features as he studied George's features before releasing a contented sigh. "Okay."



From wearing Dream's shirt, and from asking him to cook for him, and to end up *helping* him cook, George wasn't sure *who* he had become.

Or how he'd come to be this person.

Until he caught himself stealing glances at Dream when silence would briefly overtake them—when his brows were knitted in slight concentration over the task at hand, how he'd chew on his bottom lip as he contemplated what other ingredient he wanted to include.

George wasn't sure who he had become, but it felt good. And he wanted to be good. *God, did he want to be good after all that shit with Quackity and his relapse.*

George found it came easy when he tried to be good around Dream. One of the many reasons Dream didn't have to worry about their carnal engagement lied within the reasons behind why George *liked* spending time with him—liked to *stay*.

Words were barely exchanged when they devoured the contents of their plates, their deep need for food clear in their silence.

George was the first to speak, turning on his stool to face Dream who sat quietly next to him. “You all done?”

Dream seemed to have been ripped out of his thoughts, tearing his gaze from his plate to look at George with a few blinks. “Um—yeah. Yes, I’m done.”

George offered him a light smile before hopping off his stool, stacking Dream’s plate onto his before he disposed of them in the sink. Turning around, he noticed that Dream’s eyes were fixed on him, in the same way they had been when he initially put the shirt on.

“I never asked you if it was okay,” George said, meriting his eyes. “Me wearing your shirt.”

Dream perked in his seat instantly, propping his interlocked hands on the kitchen island. “Of course it’s okay.”

George directed his smile at the floor, looking at him through a grounded gaze, spotting the worry that rested in Dream’s knitted eyebrows. “Still thinking about it, aren’t you?”

Dream shyly nodded.

George sighed, pushing himself off the edge of the counter as he walked towards him. Dream instinctively turned on his tool just as George met his side.

“Why wouldn’t you tell me that it hurt?” Dream whispered through a sigh, wrapping his arms around George’s waist and resting his head against his clothed stomach.

Fragile, George stood still for a moment, arms ghosting around Dream’s shoulders before he wrapped them carefully around him, *kind soul*, he carded his fingers through his hair, in a way that always seemed to soothe a muscle or two from Dream.

When George stepped in-between his legs, Dream seated him on his right thigh, leaning his head away from where it naturally slid up to his chest, finally forcing himself to look at George, who brought his free hand to cradle his cheek. “I’ll tell you why. I just...um. Need a minute.”

In fact, George needed a lot more than *just a minute*. Dream nodded, craning his neck slightly when George rested his head in the curve of it. *How am I meant to tell you something I’ve yet to admit to myself?*

Dream’s hand was delicate as it slid up his bare thigh, George mindlessly watched it in its caress. *But there’s only so much comfort you grasp from my silence.* His fingers stroked the hair at the nape of Dream’s neck. *And maybe if you felt comfortable enough to cry in front of me,* Dream readjusted his arm around George’s waist, George leaned his ear into the pulse at his neck—*steady. Maybe I can tell you this, maybe I should, maybe after everything that’s happened in the last twenty-four hours, you deserve to know.*

“D’you remember when...” George shut his eyes, relaxing at the sound of Dream’s heartbeat. “...you said that thing about me not fearing self-destruction?” Dream took a moment before offering an affirmative hum. *Fuck—here we go: the context, the hardest part of this admittance.* “I’m not exactly...afraid to die.” There was a noticeable shift in Dream, George momentarily squeezed his already shut eyes. “And because sometimes I feel like I can’t—like...I already have.” He displaced the hand around Dream’s face to his chest, past the fabric of the puffer jacket. “Since I don’t allow myself to feel because...feeling is living—it’s being mentally and emotionally present in this shitty Kingdom.”

“I feel stupid for asking ‘why’, but.” Dream mumbled against his hair, earning a smile from

George.

“It’s...a choice I made.” Opening his eyes, George slid his hand up to cup Dream’s neck, “It’s the only thing that made the ‘existing’ part bearable.” He mindlessly watched the pad of his finger line the column of Dream’s throat, “I’ve been walking around this Kingdom like a ghost for the longest time of my life,” He pressed his shut eyes into his neck, slinging his arm over Dream’s shoulder as he stirred in his lap. “‘Till I came to know you.” He winced as the truth sounded into existence. “Dream,” He reeled a breath, pulling away slightly so he could catch his gaze, *soft green eyes*, he cradled the side of his face once more, *fragileness*. “When you burn me...it doesn’t hurt,” He narrowed his eyes on him. “It makes me feel alive again.”

“How...how can you say that?” Dream asked, almost voiceless.

George smiled down at him. “Because I *know* what made you lose control.”

Dream shook his head defiantly, averting his eyes. “George—”

George gently nudged his head back so he could hold his gaze. “I don’t want you to hide that from me either.”

Dream tilted his head to the side. “I’m *not* bringing you down with us, George.”

Us—you and your father.

“You’re not understanding,” George readjusted himself on his thigh, “Not only are you doing the exact opposite, but you—for *you*, I’m willing to *feel* again.” Dream’s eyes fluttered shut as a shaky breath pushed past his lips. “In fact, I don’t think I can stop it.” Dream looked at him instantly. “I don’t...want...to stop it.”

Dream’s lips twitched to the side with a grimace. “You don’t deserve this. You’re already going through *so* much shit. I’m not gonna *do* that to you—”

“You’re not doing it *to* me, you’re doing it *for* me.” Dream shook his head, unwilling to project his hurt onto others—his vulnerability. “I *want* to be there.”

Dream let out a breath. “I don’t know how many more times I can say ‘thank you’ before it starts to sound meaningless.”

George lightly rolled his head back with a faint smile. “You shouldn’t have to thank me for this,”

“I’m not asking for your pity,” Sapnap’s words fled into his head as he stared at his best friend’s eyes. *“And I can assure you Dream doesn’t want it either.”*

“I stay because I *want* to, Dream.” That had earned him no rebuttal from Dream as he stared at him, eyes flowing through George’s features.

“And what if I...lose control again?”

“You’re not gonna lose it like *that* again, not to that intensity.”

Dream subtly rolled his eyes. “You don’t know that—”

Mocking the words Dream had once used against him, George mimicked, “I *do* know that.” There was a pause followed by a hesitant lop-sided smile on the blonde’s face. “It was all...that pent up anger from him.”

'Him' didn't need an attached name for Dream to catch on as he said, "Which is exactly *why* you shouldn't be on the receiving end of it." He clicked his tongue, momentarily glancing at the ground. "I can't bear the idea of hurting you...I...I can't do that to you because I—" He bit his lip, brief confusion settled within George until he received Dream's gaze. "—fuck, I *like* you, George."

I know, George pursed his lips to suppress a smile as he glanced down at their laps.

"A *lot*." Dream continued valiantly. "You're the only person who I feel...understands me—the only one who...*looks* at me."

Unlike your father?

George's tongue slicked his lips, drawing an inhale as he fixed his gaze onto his. "Now do you understand why I don't want you to hide from me?"

Dream huffed. "I don't wanna impose that shit onto you."

"I want you to." George urged. "I don't want you to force down your tears or anger—especially since I know it wasn't directed at me."

Dream scoffed, seemingly disgusted with himself. "I blacked out so many times, George. *That's* what fucking scares me."

George frowned. "I'm not scared."

"That's because nothing scares you."

You scare me. George wanted to say, *I could hurt you, I could lose you—that would fucking scare me*. But he parried.

"No, Dream. It's because I know that you wouldn't have allowed yourself to lose control with me if you didn't believe that I was enjoying it, too."

A knowing smirk grew on George's face from earlier, the reason behind his insuppressible laughter when Dream was worried about having hurt him when George was the most turned on he'd ever been.

When he caught Dream's discerning look, followed by slightly widened eyes, George bit his lip with a growing grin.

"Oh." Dream whispered.

"*Oh*," George teasingly mimicked him through a faint giggle. "You're an idiot—you're saying you blacked out—*isn't* that more of a reason to believe that even if you weren't fully in control of yourself, you still had the decency *not* to go out of line with me?"

"Fine, but...you can't just—" When George cocked a challenging eyebrow at him, Dream shot him a sly look. "—you can't just validate the way I broke the—"

George gave his shoulder a tight squeeze as he warningly said, "If you say the goddamn code of conduct."

Dream paused before breaking into a defeated, guilty smile.

George's own faded away when a realization struck him. "He's made you think losing control is

all bad, hasn't he?" He watched the smile dissipate from Dream's lips as he hesitantly nodded. "I don't think it's bad." He brushed back the wisps of Dream's fringe, "Because I've seen more of you today than I have in the last week, or so, of knowing you." He watched a bashful smile appear on Dream's face, urging his own as he whispered, "Metaphorically...*and* physically."

An unwarranted laugh sputtered past Dream's lips as he hid his face in George's chest. "Oh my god..." a groan that sounded muffled, but clear in embarrassment.

George chuckled in the nest of his hair, leaning back with Dream as they locked eyes. Dream simpered, knocking his forehead with his, brushing the tips of their noses before he pressed a chaste kiss onto his lips.

George brought his lips to his ear, smirking against it as he whispered, "By the way," He set a ghosting kiss before saying, "I like you, too."

Dream exhaled against his collarbone, tightening his arm around his waist and the hand around his thigh when he re-engaged their kiss: *slow, gentle, delicate*.

"You know," Dream momentarily broke away, speaking against George's lips. "Since we're naming things we like...I gotta say something about you wearing my shirt."

George drew in his bottom lip, grinning against Dream's own. "Yeah?"

Dream hummed, stealing a quick peck from him.

"And what's that?" George kissed the corner of his mouth.

"You look *really* fucking good in it."

George wondered how Dream did it: how he'd go from being the most fragile thing he knew to the confidence he kept on the low to uphold his respectful image as a royal. How he'd make George succumb under his burning touch, to whispering sweet nothings with a mouth of honey, to slipping in curse words through raw statements, which he'd previously scold himself for—and for which George was glad Dream was finally learning to let go of, around him.

Because fuck—Dream passed his hand under the fabric sheathing George's thigh as George slid the puffer jacket off Dream's shoulders, deepening the salacious kiss—*this side of him was easily his new fix*.

"What the *fuck*?" A voice shouted from behind them.

George slid off Dream's thigh, almost knocking back the stool in front of them.

Quickly turning around, stumbling back in between Dream's legs who staggered behind him, George's hands were quick to cover the obscenity of the intruders' horror: with one hand tugging down Dream's shirt that hadn't felt as short as it did at that moment, and the other hand over his mouth to cover the bite he'd receive from Dream's teeth when they'd been lousily interrupted.

"Wait..." Karl trailed off, a grin breaking onto his face.

The zipper of Dream's puffer jacket sounded through the silence as George *begged* for all of this to be a sick, twisted nightmare.

"You know what," Niki chimed in. "I..." She jutted her bottom lip, shaking her head. "...can't say I'm surprised."

“Yeah, I’m with you on that.” Karl progressed into the kitchen, walking right past George and Dream without a second glance. “Cute shirt.” He mumbled to George before opening the fridge.

“Why the fuck are you guys awake?” George’s voice sounded to him like nails on a chalkboard as he struggled to get his words out.

“We were in Q’s room. Got hungry.” Niki shrugged, taking a seat on the stool. “Karl, can you get me—”

“No, *what the fuck?*” Quackity flailed his arms at them. “You guys know you eat food here? Not each other’s tongues?” Before George could tell him to *shut the fuck up*, he settled down next to Niki. “Why the fuck is he here, anyway?”

“Be nice...” Karl lulled from behind them.

“That’s no way to treat guests,” Niki concurred before glimpsing over at Dream. “How are you on this fine nightfall, Prince Vulcan? Running away from your parent? ‘Cause same—”

“Niki.” George shot her look.

Niki shrugged before looking at Quackity, the both of them sharing a knowing smile.

“Have you guys been drinking?” George narrowed his eyes on them just as Karl joined the other two.

“Quackity can’t. It’d fuck with the healing herbs, but Niki and I,” Karl draped an arm around her. “We might’ve had a few.”

“We’re celebrating Q’s life!” Niki threw her hands up, earning a cheer from Karl.

Quackity and George had been holding eye contact for a moment since he’d walked into the kitchen: a look that was telling enough for George to know that *wasn’t* the truth.

George jutted his chin at him. “You leaving me out again?”

A silence fell around them.

Quackity shook his head. “You’re the one who was unavailable.”

“Tell me.” George urged.

Quackity stared at him before veering his gaze to Dream. “He’s gotta go first.”

Dream was quick to move, but George held him in place with a tight grip on his wrist. “He’s staying.”

“George.” Dream and Quackity both said in dichotomizing tones.

George glanced up at Dream, “You’re staying.” He quietly told him before looking at his three friends. “He’s gonna help us.”



Dream felt like a part of him always understood George, because he knew someone like him. One of the many reasons his mother didn’t make it out alive here, other than the obvious being his father, was that each day in this “shitty Kingdom” held its fucking challenges.

Because one moment, he had George on top of him, right where he wanted him ever since that moment at Saturnalia. And the next, he was spiralling because of the burn marks he'd left, which he was reassured when George told him he was actually thriving off of them.

And now, he had three pairs of unfamiliar eyes, mainly Quackity's, staring back at him. Three of George's best friends, one of which, for some reason, *somehow*, possibly hated Dream more than his own father did.

But if there was any time to get on their good side, it was now. Now and forever because he, too, to some extent, understood the wrath towards Sebastian. And he, too, at the very same degree, wanted Sebastian gone.

They were all sitting in silence: George at the stool next to him, Karl on the counter behind Niki and Quackity who were on the opposite side of the kitchen island.

"Well," Karl was the first to speak. "This silence is killing me, gotta be honest—so, I'll go first—"

Niki breathed out exasperatingly. "Thank fuck, Karl—"

"—Your Highness," Karl smiled softly at him; it wasn't forced, Dream was mildly at ease. "We all essentially want your father dead, but he's sort of like a roach—kinda tough to get rid of the guy—so...any ideas?"

From how his stool was caged in between Dream's spread legs, George leaned his side into him, almost as if to assure that he didn't have to speak if he didn't want to.

Pressing his inner thigh against George's back in a similar assurance, Dream looked at Karl. "I'll need some time to properly work something out, but his tactic has always been 'being one step ahead'," He glanced at the three of them. "He has no idea that you guys know about Queen Anthea, so being ahead of *him* gives us an insane advantage already."

Quackity spun in his stool. "Damn, you really didn't get caught?" He asked Karl.

Karl winked at him. "Stealthy as a ninja, baby."

"That's my boy."

A fist bump was shared behind Niki's back as she and George shared an endeared smile.

"So," Quackity leaned into the counter to glimpse at Dream. "When do we go against him?"

"Not any time soon," Dream said, catching the look that the three friends shared. "He's on edge, at the moment. If we act now, he's gonna suspect something. We have to lay low, for a bit."

"You're...joking, right—he's gotta be fucking kidding." Quackity glared at George.

"What do we do in the meantime?" George sighed, glancing up at Dream. "We can't just...sit and wait."

"We're gonna have to wait," Dream quietly said to him before meeting three pairs of narrowing eyes. "We're not gonna be doing nothing, though."

Quackity dwindled his hand, "Any day now."

George shot him a glare, Quackity shrugged at him.

Placing a careful hand on George's lower back, Dream leaned into the edge of the counter. "We need to get in contact with The Nether and call it off. Lessen our battles. We don't need more blood on our hands."

Karl dug his elbows onto his parted knees, leaning in. "How do we get in contact with them?"

"My father must have documents that contain coordinates, a number..." Dream trailed off with a slow shrug. "...we just have to get in his office."

"Well, we all know how shit I am at snooping, so," Niki rested her forearms onto the island, "Who wants to do the honours of trespassing?"

Quackity scoffed, reclining in his stool. "Last time I tried getting my hands on a plan, I almost got cindered by his little friend." He scowled at Dream. "So, count me out."

Four pairs of eyes landed on Karl.

Karl lightly threw his hands up. "Um, you guys do realize that if I die, that's one less pair of hands to revive any of you."

Three pairs of eyes met George.

George almost laughed. "Don't look at me. I'm the shittiest fighter out of all of us. *And* his next target. I don't stand a chance if I'm caught."

Quackity slapped his hands on the island before drumming them, glancing at Dream. "Alright, big man. It's all you."

Karl pressed his back against the cupboard, a smug smile stitching his lips. "Yeah, do it for your boyfriend."

Though it was mocking, the term caused a jerk in Dream's heart rate.

George perked up in his seat. "*Karl*."

"I'll do it." Dream easily said, earning their attention.

"Seriously?" Niki asked through a smile.

George eyed him warily. "Dream—"

"Consider it an apology on behalf of my father for almost wiping out your smart friend over here." Dream jerked his head at Quackity.

Quackity, if Dream had caught correctly, almost smiled at the statement. "For someone that's apologizing, that sounded *awfully* passive, Your Highness."

A small silence passed them as Karl hopped off the counter to return his empty glass to the sink. Dream, in that time, took notice of the way George's hands were trembling—in fact, it seemed as if they had been for a while in the duration of his conversation.

Trembling in the same way they did when we were just starting those practice sessions, Dream went in to grab them, but Quackity spoke up.

"And how do we know you're not just fucking us over right now?"

“Enough, Quackity.” George huffed, bringing one shaky hand to rest his forehead onto the balls of his palm.

And though George was only being protective—something that warmed Dream’s heart ever since the first instance outside the pub—he understood Quackity’s doubts.

Instead of directly answering him, Dream reached for George’s free hand on his lap—interlacing their fingers, sensing the shift in George’s position on his stool.

Dream could feel George’s eyes on him, but he glanced at his friends. “Look, I know you guys don’t have a reason to trust me, so I’m doing this to prove my loyalty.”

Quackity bit the inside of his cheek, averting his gaze. “Why? It’s not like we’re friends.”

Dream chuckled with a nod. “We aren’t.” He looked at George, who had never taken his eyes off him. “But you’re his, so.”

A faint smile grew on George’s lips before he turned to face his friends. “We need all the help we can get.”

Dream tore his eyes from George’s side profile to look at them one last time. “I *want* Sebastian gone.”



George knew he was fucked the moment he got a whiff of *it* off of Karl when he walked past them in the kitchen. Or the sheer memories of the taste of it when it was mentioned.

So, when he rose next to Dream that following morning, peppering him in kisses that went from his neck down to his chest, and Dream was more than compliant when allowing him to proceed further down south, George got his fix.

And he chased it all day. Chased the taste of him with interruptive kisses during their training session, the taste on his lips, tongue, neck.

Becoming dependent on Dream was probably gonna bite him in the ass at some point, George felt it at his core. And when Dream was about to return to Vulcan for collective training, George was already suffering withdrawals: from *it* and from Dream.

Until thirty minutes passed; minutes that felt like dreadful *hours* in the closing walls of George’s bedroom as he paced, brainlessly tickled the ivories, showered while staring blankly at the tiles, or at the ceiling when he was laying on the ottoman at the center of his bathroom—because doing anything was better than leaning into temptations; the ones following that hard-hitting comedown.

But thirty minutes passed and Dream was back at his door. George had to hold himself back from tackling him into a hug because, in reality, *he had just seen him less than an hour ago—doing that would be plain fucking embarrassing.*

“Sebastian is conducting collective training for the next couple of days,” Dream pulled him by the waist. “So...” He grinned down at him when George’s smile progressed. “...is there anything you’d like to do?”

George tilted his chin, his eyes flitting down to Dream’s lips. “Nothing in particular,” He rested his hands onto Dream’s chest before leaning up slightly to whisper, “But there *is* somewhere I’d like to be.”

Hours passed them when they resided in Dream's mother's study—lounging around together had become second nature to them, it seemed.

Second nature. George reclined on the loveseat, book in hand, stealing glances at Dream—*second nature*—caught in the act of thieving glimpses, flustered as Dream returned his fingers to the piano's ivory bones—*second nature*—George joined him on the piano stool when Dream grew visibly frustrated—*second nature*—when they played the song together through giggles and bumping fingers—*second nature*—when Dream couldn't fight off the urge to kiss him.

They'd kiss, and touch, and feel every inch of each other's skin and George wondered how that came to be—*how it was all so fucking instinctive.*

But that's how people get close, isn't it? George carded his fingers through his hair, his eyes studying Dream's features as comfortable silence encircled them. *They burn your soul and you heal theirs.*

“Well, would you look at that,” A voice tore through their solace, ripping apart their shared gaze as they fixed it onto *him*.

Dream stiffened in his seat before he stood up vastly, George was just as quick on his feet. And were it not for what Dream had said about “laying low”, George would have reached for the handle of Dream's sword, where it was tucked at the back of his harness, and stabbed Sebastian with it.

Sebastian swayed in his steps, slowly walking over to them with a glass of scotch in hand. *Great—as if Sebastian himself wasn't his number one problem, problem number two was clutched in the idiot's hand.* “The lovely couple.”

Dream sighed, turning around to face George. “You have to go.”

George furrowed his eyebrows as he looked up at him. “No.”

Dream's jaw set as he fixed him. “George. Leave.”

George frowned, shaking his head. “I'm not leaving you.” *Not with him.*

Dream cocked his head to the side, sending him a small glare before he returned his attention to his father—who stood before them. Traces of alcohol emitted his space, George was almost thankful when Dream gently gripped his elbow to pull him away from Sebastian and into his side.

“She would be proud of you,” Sebastian slurred, waving his drink at Dream. “Using your heart instead of your head.” George glimpsed up at Dream, who seemed unfazed, maybe just inconvenienced at the scene before him—*you're used to this shit.* “To your mother,” His father raised his drink in the air, a portion of the liquor swinging out, splashing onto the ground.

George stepped away slightly—if *this idiot doesn't stop waving this scent around*, he leaned into Dream's side—he's *going to crack.*

Sebastian pushed his glass towards Dream. “Have a drink. Cheers with me.” His son briefly looked away from him. “It's her day after all.”

George instantly looked up at Dream, who hadn't looked at him once since his father entered, almost like he was ashamed of the man in front of him—ashamed that George was seeing this and procuring a mirroring image.

“Or did you forget?” Sebastian smirked against the rim of his glass.

“It’s tomorrow.” Dream rasped. “Seems *you’ve* forgotten.”

“Ah, of course.” Sebastian sighed. “Of course you didn’t forget the... *specifics*—always...choosing her over me, right?”

Dream huffed quietly, taking a small step forward. “You need to sleep this off—”

“King George,” Sebastian leaned away from his son, directing his drunk gaze to George, who stared at him blankly—*lay low, no matter how tempting it is to smash that glass over his head.* “You must forgive my behaviour.” When he waywardly stepped towards him, George felt Dream pull him further into his side. “I am...mourning my dead wife.”

Dream sucked in a sharp breath before he stepped ahead, hand reaching for the very glass that when Sebastian pulled away from his reach, slipped and shattered against the floorboards.

George couldn’t help the jolt it derived from him, brainlessly allowing Dream to fully yank him behind as he advanced towards his father, who already began kneeling down to the mess he created.

George crossed one arm over his chest as he pressed his lips against his closed fist, watching Dream crouch down to cease his father’s actions.

“Don’t try to clean this up right now.” Dream quietly said, wrapping a firm hand around his father’s shoulder to straighten them back up. “I’ll take care of it, alright?”

This is fucking ridiculous, George wanted to say, *wanted* to step in—but over-stepping was a possibility in this instant. Especially after seeing the evasive look on Dream’s face, the way he warned him to leave like he knew exactly what was to happen with just a simple look at his father.

But George couldn’t help the involuntary step he took when Sebastian raised his hand, a step he immediately retrieved when he noticed that the man placed his palm onto Dream’s chest, where his heart sat.

“That thing still lives in there, huh?” Sebastian’s eyes began closing when he started leaning into his son.

Dream’s shoulders were tense from where George stood to the side of him as he softly said, “C’mon.” He nodded his head to the doorway. “Let’s get you to your office.”

George drew in a quiet breath while Dream threw his father’s arm over his shoulder. It was when they disappeared from this room that George released his drag, eyes wavering over the broken pieces of glass and the remnants of alcohol.

But he couldn’t even think about *it*, not with Dream deceptively calm in assisting his father to rest after the scene he just caused. *Still helping him, despite all the shit he does to you.*

Is this you ‘laying low’? Why does it not feel like that?

Following the steps Dream had taken to walk his father back to his office, George lingered in the doorway, hands pocketed, shaky where they rested, as he leaned his weight against the door frame.

He watched Dream click open a chest, pulling out a blanket and draping it over his father’s limp body—*you’re calm but my heart pains as it knows the act of putting up a facade.*

Dream straightened back up, studying his father one last time, headed for exit until Sebastian

grabbed his wrist, halting his steps. George pushed himself off the doorframe, slow and imperceptible steps began their way towards the father and his son.

Dream had said he didn't want to drag George down with them, but what if George didn't want Dream to be dragged down with *him*?

Interlacing his fingers with Dream's free hand, George lightly tugged. Dream kept his gaze fixed on his father, awaiting his imminent words.

"I always chose you over her," Sebastian uttered.

The impassiveness Dream's features possessed hardened into a simmering rage, his jaw tensed as he clenched the fist of which his wrist was firmly locked in his father's grip, and unintentionally squeezing George's hand in the process.

"Dream," George whispered, urging him to leave when he could feel the growing warmth between their clasped hands.

Dream sucked the roof of his mouth, tugging his wrist from his father's grasp as he walked away from him and George; whose hand slipped out of his when Dream said, "The only person you chose is yourself, dad."

George stayed back for a moment, not just to shoot daggers Sebastian's way, he who was already passed out from intoxication, but because there was something in his peripheral that called for him. The bottle that Sebastian had drunk from, the bottle that held the scent he smelled off of him when he entered his wife's study.

But looking back at Sebastian, realizing what had just happened, and *knowing* Dream was on the brink of another breakthrough of his pent-up anger, George left the scene—with every piece of withdrawal emitting ear-piercing screams for him to *drink*—he left and shut the door behind him.

Entering the room that knew peace prior to the tyrant's tainting effects, George spotted Dream; crouched over the broken pieces, unthinkably amassing them with no precaution.

"Hey," George called for his attention, but to no avail. "Fuck's sake, Dream." He muttered to himself as he walked over, crouching down to search for his eyes. "What the hell are you doing?" He sighed, watching Dream's hand with a small wince as he brushed over the pieces carelessly.

"I have to clean this up." Dream mumbled, thoughts elsewhere, eyes barely on the task ahead.

George reached for his wrist, ceasing them in his hands, causing Dream to shoot him a glare.

"You should've left when I told you to, George."

It wasn't harshly spoken, in fact, defeat laced itself in his tone and his features.

When Dream tried reaching for the pieces again, George moved his wrists back. "You're not being careful." He calmly stated.

Voice slightly raised, Dream replied, "Someone's going to get *hurt*."

"*You're* going to get hurt." George countered, matching his tone.

Dream desisted all attempts in returning his hands to the task, George slowly released his wrists from his hold.

And watching him, *seeing you in a situation I've only ever briefly seen when he had a harsh grip on you—seeing you suffer through it, bite your tongue and swallow bitterly*, killed the screams in George's head that *begged* him to lean into the temptations which lied in the burning liquor amongst the broken pieces of glass.

Dream dug his elbow onto his knee, shutting his eyes in his palm before he slid that hand up to his hair, clutching it as he inhaled a sharp breath. "Fuck." He whispered shakily, gaze glossing in welling tears.

With an aching heart and a burning soul, George's shoulders dropped in defeat when he leaned forward, "Dream..." He sighed before wrapping his arms around him.

Dream laid his head on his shoulder, arms to himself as he breathed out, "I wish she was here."

Having a similar absence in his life, and with a surfacing memory of himself in his best friend's arm begging for his mother's presence, George held him tighter.

Hushed against Dream's temple, George said, "I know."

Chapter End Notes

hi hi hello.

this one was a little tough to write lol. hope u enjoyed it nevertheless.

thank u for the nice.

treat yourselves really good, as you should always.

till' next update - finals is /actually/ litch rally here, hard to tell when the next one is gonna come out, but. x (:

Basic Instinct

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



I. Beauty, do you come from Heaven or rise from the abyss? Your gaze, divine and infernal, dances between benevolence and crime.

George stayed behind.

Even if Dream had told him to leave, which, in all honesty, was the last thing he wanted. Somehow, George heard that silent prayer—and he stayed.

You always do.

Dream allowed himself to be silently guided to his room where no words were exchanged in the agreement that they were gonna rinse off Sebastian's mess with the cascading water from a warm shower.

Benevolence—when George took control of the sponge, lathering it in shower gel, passing it over every inch of Dream's skin. Sleeked his fingers with shampoo, delicately running them through his hair; pressing feather-light kisses on his face as he did so.

The streaming water from the showerhead worked in tandem with George's touch from the scattering kindness they offered to Dream's skin.

An indeterminable silence encompassed them when they returned to Dream's room, both searching for fresh clothes.

Slipping on a pair of black sweats, Dream heard George ask, "Can I wear this?"

George unfolded a white, silky button-down that Dream can't recall ever wearing.

Dream half-smiled. "Of course you can."

George's cheekbones rose with his smile before he slipped the dress shirt on, unbuttoned. "Wearing pants in this shitty biome feels like a suicide mission." His hand flew over his mouth instantly before a chuckle was muffled into his palm. "I didn't—I mean," He dropped his hand. "I meant it, but that was supposed to stay..." He tapped his temple. "...in here."

Dream giggled, but his amusement faltered with his gaze on the dress shirt around George—*loose*, as it was meant to fit Dream's build.

George cuffed up the sleeves only for them to fall back down seconds later—*it was driving Dream insane*.

"You're swimming in that, George." Dream walked over to him, fingers magnetized to his cream skin; pale as moonlight under the silky white fabric.

George snaked his waist in the space of Dream's hands before his own glided over his bare chest. "I wonder why." He spoke through a smirk, flicking his gaze up to the hypnotized emerald.

He would never thank his father for anything, but in moments where George would be deeply entranced in the feel of Dream's muscles; the way they filled his dainty hands—Dream was beyond grateful for those hundred hours of consecutive training.

A short breath rolled past George's lips as he squeezed Dream's bicep, infernal regard contriving over the muscle, which Dream purposely flexed. George scoffed, sinking his head on Dream's chest.

"Show-off," George mumbled, words warm on his peck.

Dream laughed, reposing his head atop George's as he tugged his own grip before coiling an arm around his waist.

"Your laugh is lovely." George traced Dream's collarbone with his fingers.

Dream tucked his chin to glimpse down at him as if to reassure that he wasn't imagining this whole thing, but a knock at his door ceased whatever imminent words lied within their interrupted conversation.

"What?" Dream tore his gaze from George to place it on his shut door.

"Jade made some gâteaux," Punz's voice was muffled on the other end. "I'm going to bed, but she wanted me to pass it on to you."

Dream felt the silk fabric of his shirt brush off his knuckles when his hands left George's middle. "Give me a second." He hushed to him.

George nodded, stepping aside as Dream strode to his door. With a hand on the doorknob and a breath with grasped patience, Dream swung the door open to reveal his brother; dishevelled from practice and a rowdy dinner, a standard late-night look for the Vulcan warriors.

"I'm not hungry." Dream said after taking him in.

Punz tucked the bottle of wine in-between his armpit, sighing out, "Okay, well, I already had too much and I'm not letting this sit in my room, so."

Shoving the plate of squared cakes into Dream's chest, Punz began turning on his heel until his eyes caught a figure behind Dream.

Punz's lips parted slightly, sizing George from over Dream's shoulder. Annoyance rising within him, Dream gripped the edge of the plate before stepping in front of Punz, blocking George from his stare.

"Need anything else?" Dream cocked an eyebrow at him when he received his brother's glare.

"Does father know he's here?"

"Father's passed out drunk in his office."

A scowl formed on the younger's face. "Is he okay? Have you checked on him?"

Dream tautened a breath, "Yes, I have, Luke. Like I always do—why'd you let him drink in the first place?"

Punz's features scrunched. "He's not an alcoholic. We don't have to monitor his intakes."

“I know he’s not, but it’s the night before her birthday. You should’ve known.” Dream weaved his stare over him. “But how could you—you’re drunk, aren’t you?”

“We always drink a little during collective dinners. You know how they are.” Punz waved his hand to the chambers which the other warriors occupied.

“And seeing as our father is passed out, you’ve managed to sneak in a whole bottle of wine for yourself.” Dream deduced, jerking his head to the wine bottle.

“Whatever.” Punz scoffed, turning on his heel as he said, “Just ‘cause you’re the golden child doesn’t mean I have to follow in your footsteps, big brother!”

If Dream’s look released physical daggers, Punz’s back would be dressed in them. Shutting the door behind him, Dream exhaled deeply before forcing a smile at the pretty brunet; hands neatly folded behind him as he teetered on his footing—*nervously? Suspiciously?*

“Forgive him.” Dream jutted his thumb over his shoulder.

George bowed his head. “I’ve learned to disregard most Vulcan men, I’ll be honest.”

Dream lightly gaped at him, hand over his chest. “...*Ouch.*”

George took small steps towards Dream with a dubious grin. “If it makes you feel any better,” His gaze skimmed down to Dream’s lips when the space between them receded. “You’re the exception.”

Dream’s response was stolen by dark doe-eyes.

Suddenly not knowing how to act, Dream cleared his throat, cheeks surely flushed when he heard a small laugh from George. “Cake?” He nudged the plate towards him.

George glanced down at the dressed dish before looking up at him. “Not hungry. At least...not for that.” Dream swallowed, unable to look away from him—*and why would I when you look this good in my shirt?*

George brought his hands up to the plate before taking it from him.

Now, at any given moment, Dream would have considered even throwing the plate regardless of its consequence to hoist George onto his bed and give him exactly what was being insinuated. But when George’s hand trembled as it reached for the dish in his light grasp, Dream was ripped from the pit that George’s persuasion lured him in.

When George turned away to dispose of the plate onto the dresser, Dream watched him. Because *ever since* that night in the Salacian kitchen, George’s hands have been unsteady.

No, he’s been unsteady.

What was Dream supposed to make of how hypersexual George has been all day, ever since that lewd moment in bed this morning? Or the relentless kisses—ones Dream did *not* mind receiving—but ones that felt a *little* out of character.

Or maybe that’s who you are when you open up.

But if so, why does your look dance between someone vaguely familiar and someone I took a hit for in that pub?

George brought those very hands to Dream's chest once more before sliding them up to curve them around his neck.

Eyes raking over Dream's torso before he pressed his lips against his neck, George said, "You smell good." A wet kiss was placed onto his skin, as tender as he was, yet salacious in its discourse. "So, so good."

"George," Dream chuckled lightly against his hair, hands loosening at his waist.

George placed another kiss, biting down on the skin before sucking it in between his lips.

Not answering your name as if I've called for the wrong person.

It took everything within him to pull George away; voice shot as he beckoned, "George." Dream was willingly powerless under his cold touch.

If George's hands were trembling point-blank, Dream would've allowed himself to free fall in the pit of carnality, but that wasn't the case.

He wasn't stupid. Dream's seen all of this before; he was familiar with how the sheer sight or scent or mention of alcohol could trigger an addict to the state that George was in right now.

And avoidance, in their case, was their only escape when *other things* weren't available.

And this is you avoiding—you've been avoiding ever since this morning. George lined Dream's jaw with lax kisses—*keeping your mouth busy from what you truly desire.*

"Dream." George sighed, pressing himself against Dream's groin. "M'hungry for you, Dream."

You say my name, I hear your drug of choice.

Dream squeezed his waist, pulling him away slightly as he dipped his lips to his ear. "George—"

George pulled away, leaning his palms onto Dream's collarbones. "Fuck, sorry, did...did you not want to do this—"

"No, no. Hey," Dream cupped his face, forcing a smile.

I wanna do this with you—with...you.

You—George forced his eyes onto him when Dream lightly jerked his head up—*where are you?*

"I do. Want this. God, I do—I just..." Dream chuckled nervously. "Are you...okay?"

George's expression dulled, from evasive to offended. A beat of silence where smiles were reprimanded in shared remorse.

"It's midnight." George cut him off.

Another beat of silence.

Dream's brows knitted. "What?"

George broke into a smile—*posed, evasive.* "Twelve." He bucked his chin at the clock on Dream's side table. "On the dot."

Avoidance.

Dream blinked at him. “Okay, but—”

“It’s her birthday.”

Restlessness.

Dream couldn’t even process the fact that it was technically his mother’s birthday and a part of him didn’t really want to—not around George; for fear that he would see how broken he was on the inside and clinging on to someone that had left ages ago.

George smiled softly, tucking a short strand of hair behind Dream’s ear. “You never told me her name.”

Senseless—this conversation, from the beginning to the assumed end of the road it took, had no direction because of George’s cognitive absence.

Dream, knowing for a fact that he wasn’t going to get through to him on the basis of curiosity and care, quietly answered, “Violette.”

George’s smile beamed through his features. “With two ‘T’s?” A grin so contagious it derived a chuckle from Dream, who nodded. “It’s French.”

Dream nodded again. “Her mom was French.”

George hummed, briefly looking to the side. “We should...throw a party.”

Dream’s eyebrows shot up. “A par—a *party*?” Earning a nod, he giggled unsurely. “O...kay? With whom?”

“You and I, of course.” George drew in his bottom lip before pushing away from Dream, snatching the plate of gateaux from the dresser and mindlessly fixing them as he said, “We already have the cakes. We just need music and...” He trailed off, walking towards Dream while holding up a cake to his mouth. “...dancing.”

Before Dream could answer, George lightly urged him to take a bite, which he half-heartedly did; eyes warily dancing over George’s countenance.

“Good?” George asked through a grin.

Are you? Dream wanted to ask but nodded instead. He watched George aimlessly re-position the cakes, really only switching them from one spot to another with zero purposes.

He was fucking restless.

He wasn’t high, Dream knew that much. Because he’d been with him ever since that night, the night that brought them this close—the night that had George effortlessly going down on him that morning.

But *that’s* what worried him—because George’s hands were shaky where they repositioned the cakes. And ever since he first noticed the unsteadiness under the kitchen island of the Salacian palace, Dream wanted to bring it up.

But *that* avoidance—the very one that had happened just a few minutes ago when George deviated the unfinished question by stating the time—*that* avoidance had him more worried.

And if Dream knew what was to come for the rest of the night, he would have stopped it; would have forced him into talking about it, or do anything to help him.

But Dream didn't know.

The realization of what was only the beginning of George's downfall was going to happen in perilous increments.

II. Beauty, do you fall from the stars or emerge from a black pit? You scatter perfumes like a stormy night; your kisses are a philtre and your mouth - *amphora*.

"George, slow down, I'm gonna drop this plate if—"

"C'mon, Dream," George ushered, tugging on Dream's wrist as they jogged down the large staircase. "C'mon."

"*Why* are we rushing?" Dream asked through an unwarranted laugh.

George was definitely not himself. He didn't necessarily know *all* of George, but he knew a fair bit to know that *this* wasn't him. Or it was a side of him, but a facade that was more intensified than the one where he tried to seem apathetic and impassive.

"I wanna play." George giggled, leaping over the last step before twirling on his heel.

Play—like that night he showed up at Dream's door with vacant eyes and empty smiles.

Dream was at least a little grateful that no one else was awake because he was sauntering around with George—both of them amiss a crucial item of clothing and looking undeniably disrespectful in a royal palace.

He barely had the time to shut the door behind him when George snared the plate from his hand, tossing it onto the accent table before pushing him up against the wall.

Pressing himself against Dream, George's hands latched to his neck as he began peppering kisses all over his face. Dream—for all the reasons leading up to this manic version of George—couldn't push him off if he tried.

He, as much as George's actions were alarming, *was fucking loving it*.

Whenever he'd caught the frenzy covering over the emptiness behind George's eyes, Dream wouldn't feel pity for what any other person would think: *has anybody been looking after you?*

Because Dream knew he had friends, all fierce and very forward in their care for George, *especially that Quackity guy*.

But when Dream would catch his infernal yet amphoric gaze, he just knew George would reject the care and nurture. An assumption validated through George's, "*I'm not exactly afraid to die. And because sometimes I feel like I already have.*"

He didn't want to be 'okay'. In fact, George had already given up on that.

"She has records, right? I feel like I've seen them." George breathlessly asked after untangling

himself from Dream's arms to make way towards the shelf next to the couch. "Fucking hell, Violette has *delectable* taste in music—have I ever told you that?"

Ever since this restlessness took place, all Dream *could* do was watch. Because were he to intervene, to jostle George out of this mania, it would fuck everything up. *Letting this pass, somehow, was the better outcome.*

So, Dream played along. "I can't say you have."

"Well, she does." George slipped out a sleeve, sliding the disc out and shifting it over to the record player.

All of it was done with so much ease, it almost made the play-along with avoidance easy.

Dream's hand was interlocked with his the moment a melody sounded through the record player. George grinned up at him before dragging him to the middle of the room.

"Dream, Prince Clay, Your Royal Highness,"

Dream chuckled, shaking his head. "Don't call me 'Clay', I beg you."

George laughed as he enunciated, "*Clay.*"

That sound—melodious as the music chiming through, was the first of many laughs Dream was granted to hear that night—and *he fucking revelled in it.*

George tipped his chin, head tilted to the side with a crapulous smile dancing on his lips. "Do you know how to dance 'the smooth'?"

Dream's smile widened with George's; the room felt blurred around him as his eyes drank in every single lit-up feature of his fair countenance. *He was so fucking beautiful, whether or not he was aware of it.*

"I do," Tenderly, Dream hushed, "King George."

George paused for a brief moment before his lips cracked into a grin. "M'letting that pass 'cause of the way it sounded coming from your mouth."

Dream wrapped his arms around his bare waist. "That's a bold statement coming from you, isn't it?"

George giggled, slinging his arms around his shoulders before lazily brushing his lips against Dream's. "Yes, but..." He pressed a soft kiss onto them. "...I've come to be so enamoured with you that I can't seem to hate anything you say."

It was Dream's turn to take a pause because *that* was bolder than anything George had said that night, and possibly the most convincing.

George softly kissed his cheek. "I like the sound of your voice," He began, trailing kisses to his temple, "So much so that—" leaning up slightly on his tip-toes as the absence of his heeled boots vexed his height, "—I could listen to you speak all day."

Dream's arms felt ghostly around George's middle as he allowed his words to wrap him up in endless comfort, reassurance, and closure—even if George felt like he was miles away. *Ghostly*, that's why it felt like that.

Maybe the only way to get the truth out of him was when he would get like this, Dream thought. *But how did you get like this?* Did he have a condition Dream wasn't aware of?

So many questions brimmed over his head the more George *did* and *did* with no accompanying explanation. And Dream couldn't even dare to ask for one.

If he could get past the fact that George was acting eerily unfamiliar, Dream could love it. Dream *was* loving it. Because George felt and acted alive. Keyword: *acted*—there lied Dream's hesitance to love and dwell.

Where Dream held him tight, he got a whiff of that sweet mint and pine George carried. And despite it not holding the toxic liquor it was once interlaced with when he last acted similar to how he was right now, his scent still held that jarring feeling—still held a stormy night.

It was when the music picked up that Dream found himself twirling George, deriving giggles and quiet laughs which augmented in volume when Dream would pull him in and out, spinning and spinning as deliriously as their minds were.

"Lift me," George commanded when Dream spun him back against his chest.

Raising their meshed hands above George's head and giving him a whirl to face him, Dream asked through a small laugh, "I beg your pardon?"

"For the big finish." George smiled, lacing his fingers through his hair and showering him in kisses—something he was doing every time Dream would pull him into his chest.

"Oh, because we're performing for a crowd now?" Dream teased.

"Yes." George pouted when he pulled his lips away from Dream's cheek. "And you're ruining our final move by talking."

Dream cocked an eyebrow at him, leaning in to speak against his temple. "That's funny. I could've *sworn* you said you could listen to me talk all day, but." George laughed, audible and canorous that it keened Dream's heart. "Ready, then, my little ballerina?" He chuckled.

"Do *not* call me that—"

Dream stole his words as he lifted him from the ground, earning a gasp from George before his hands were quick to support his weight as they pressed onto Dream's shoulders.

"Oh my God, Dream—"

An unfinished sentence spun out with Dream's step as he twirled the both of them, laughter and the tempo of the song rising before it all fell down in a soothing decline.

Lowering him down on the ground, their gaze locked, Dream felt George's legs wrap around his torso. Arms instinctive to support his weight, their foreheads leaning against the other as their breaths filled their space, Dream thought, *maybe—just maybe that's what you needed. Maybe I can bring it up now.*

But George didn't have the same idea. Barely lingering in the moment, his feet landed back on the carpet and he grabbed Dream's hand into his when walking over to the accent table where he'd dispose of the cakes.

Propping himself up on the table and placing the plate on his lap, George lifted a cake up to

Dream's mouth.

"You keep offering and never take any for yourself." Dream stated through a smile as he stepped in between George's legs.

There was an unintentional metaphor in there somewhere, Dream thought. Or shit, maybe it was intentional.

George tipped his head to the side. "Why are you being difficult?"

Dream scoffed, a surprised laugh escaping past his lips. "I'm being *what* now?"

George fought back a smile. "You heard me loud and clear, Prince Clay."

Dream shot him a small look. "George, I swear—"

The feeling of cake being smeared onto his face was almost so shocking, Dream could have sworn he was hallucinating it until he stared back at George through a gaze blurred by icing.

From what he could see, George's free hand was clasped over his mouth, suppressing a laugh. "Oh my god."

"George..."

"I..." George withdrew his hand from his mouth, a hesitant laugh bursting through his breath. "...I don't even feel the slightest bit sorry."

Dream raised an eyebrow at him before calmly saying, "We just showered, George." He was forcing calmness in his tone, knowing very well what his next move was going to be.

George pouted. "Cry about it."

If George wanted to act out tonight, Dream could *easily* match his energy. He grew up around Vulcan warriors, the most unhinged group of people in the entirety of the 'Elemental Kingdom.'

Dream lowered his gaze onto him, moving a caked strand of hair from his forehead. "I'm gonna give you five seconds to run."

"Ooh," George wiggled his fingers at him, cake still smeared on some. "So scary—"

"One," Dream began, earning a giggle from George. "Two," George shifted in his seat, causing Dream to lean forward. "Three—" When George smeared more icing on the nape of his neck, Dream lurched at him, the other hand reaching for a cake.

George slipped away from his grasp, aiming for the door, but Dream was quicker than him—wrapping a firm arm around his waist as he jerked him against his chest.

"You said five seconds—*Dream*," George yelped, failing to grab his wrist when Dream moved his hands away from his untouched face. "*Fuck*. Off."

"Not scared, huh?"

George went to say something, but the words were hushed when Dream smudged a full cake over his face. Their laughter was muffled and interrupted with small shoves and jabs as they tried to get back at each other; the cakes being used as weapons.

George succeeded in getting away for a maximum of two seconds before Dream had him pinned to the ground, their arms and hands fighting their way to smear the last bit of cake they could reach for.

“St—okay, *stop*.” George gasped, coughing up slightly until he broke into a fit of giggles.

Dream propped himself up onto his elbows, caging George in. Only the soft melody of the turning disc could be heard in their space, accompanied by their calming breaths.

George brushed away the caked strands where they stuck to Dream’s forehead, almost immediately retracting his hand afterwards, biting down on the side of his finger as a blush crept up his cheeks.

Dream furrowed his eyebrows at him. “What?” Softly asked as he wiped some icing from George’s flushed cheeks

“You’re pretty,” George whispered. “Even like this.”

III. Beauty, whether you come from heaven or from hell, who cares? You sow, at random, joy or disaster. Angel or Siren, you make the minutes less leaden and the universe less hideous.

Whether George coloured the greyness of Dream’s world for better or for worse was undetermined—it was too early to tell.

But even as destructive as George was, as he has been since that morning, Dream was leaning towards the better.

Did George make it hard to breathe? Yes. Did he also make Dream feel like he was coming up for air with every kiss, every touch? Definitely.

It was a push and pull that Dream wouldn’t give for the world, even when George was restless and Dream could really use sleep. Or at least he knew his body craved it—but George was waking him up the more he just *did* and *did*.

Pretty giggles and soft breathless laughs occupied the dark of the kitchen when they’d gone in to clean themselves off.

“All done.” George tossed the rag into the sink before hoisting himself up on the counter. “Except for...” He trailed off, arms indolent over Dream’s shoulders before he pressed his lips against his, purposely breaking apart to lick the icing off them.

Dream’s hand gripped his thighs, chuckling against the kiss as George continued to alleviate his lips of their sweetness, replacing them with his own.

George drew away from him, eyes fluttering shut when Dream passed his thumbs on either side of his face, brushing the dampened black strands that stuck to his cheeks and bridge of his nose.

“Play the piano for me.”

Dream’s gaze flitted from George’s lips to his lidded eyes. “You...*what*?”

George grinned. "Play the song I taught you."

Dream scoffed. "I didn't get any better."

"I don't care." George nudged the tip of his nose with his.

"Don't you wanna sleep?" Dream glimpsed at the clock, a few metres away, above George's head. "It's almost two in the morning."

George rolled his head back with a grunt. "*I have* been sleeping."

Dream chuckled, massaging his thigh with one hand, his middle with the other. "You've been doing the exact opposite, George."

George lulled his head forward, lightly bumping it with Dream's. "You know what I mean."

Dream didn't, not until then—urging him out of the senseless space George sequestered him in with persuasive smiles and philtered kisses.

"George?" Dream quietly beckoned, meriting his eyes. "Can I ask you something?"

George's smile faded, jaw slightly clenched. *Not saying no, not saying yes—why don't you ever say anything?*

"What's..." Dream swallowed, studying him carefully. "...what's wrong?"

George blinked at him. "I don't understand your question."

Daring himself to counter him, Dream took in a small breath before saying, "I think you do."

George's leg tensed under him before he dropped his head onto Dream's shoulder, where he said something Dream didn't quite catch.

"What did you say?" Dream craned his neck, glimpsing down at him the best he could.

"I don't know what's going on."

Dream tried to pull him off so he could look at him, but George only pulled him in tighter, legs constricting around his waist.

Bringing a careful hand to the back of George's head, Dream caressed his hair—*the way you do to me*.

"You're...just," Dream rubbed circles onto his clothed back, *slow and steady*. "I think you're just...a little restless."

"I haven't taken anything."

"I know—"

George pulled away entirely, gripping his shoulders as he peered into his eyes with his own sullen ones. "I promise I didn't."

Dream nodded, almost as frantic as George looked. "I believe you."

"I need to do this, Dream." George breathed out, corroding confusion into Dream's expression. "I

need to do *things*—everything.”

George was switching between so many different moods, had been switching between different states of consciousness—and Dream couldn’t keep up for the life of him.

But as he stared back into George’s eyes, he could see that George needed not only this constant string of avoidance, but *help*—he needed help. Dream just didn’t know how to do that, mostly because George didn’t *want* help, or he did and was too afraid to ask.

“Plath said that’s because...we’re dangerously close to wanting nothing.” George continued, quietly, almost to himself.

Dream, at this point, was at a loss for words.

Not knowing *where* George was, yet running to catch up with him as he breathlessly asked, “What?”

“When we find ourselves wanting everything,” George concluded.

Dream stared back, slowly shaking his head with a small shrug. “I don’t know what you’re—”

“Kiss me.” George ushered before crashing his lips onto Dream’s, a kiss that was hungry, desperate, urgent. “Fuck me.” He spoke against Dream’s hesitant lips.

“Geor—okay, stop.” Dream leaned back, placing two careful hands onto his chest. “Are you sure? You’re not even—”

“I’m sure. Please. I need—” His fingernails dug into Dream’s shoulder blades. “I need you, okay?”

Dream wasn’t sure if *George* was sure of what he needed, but there was a sense of haste in his tone that sounded like he was almost scared. And if he felt safe through Dream’s carnal touch, how was Dream to deny him? How *could* Dream deny him?

While greedily tugging down Dream’s pants, George took in a small breath, “Tell me when to...” gripping the waistband of Dream’s briefs. “...when to stop.”

“The *last* thing I want you to do is stop, but,” Dream cupped his face. “George, you’re acting... you’re a little out of it right now—”

“—I didn’t take anything.”

“No, I know that. I just need to know that you really want this—”

George slipped his hand into Dream’s briefs, fingers wrapping around him, causing Dream’s hand to twitch against George’s face where he tried not to tighten his grip.

“You wanna know what I want, Dream?” George spoke between their brushing lips, pressing a wet kiss onto them—an unwarranted, low groan resonated from Dream’s throat as a response, eyes lazily drawn down to where George’s hand stroked him. “I want you to fuck me numb.” His pumps were slow and taunting as he used his free hand to cup Dream’s jaw, forcing his eyes onto him. “Want you to fuck me until I can’t feel a thing.”

Angel or Siren, Dream was way past salvation from the persuasion that dripped from George’s fingers around his cock. Or his rough kisses that would leave bruises on his lips.

Angel or Siren, Dream was fucking encaptured and putty in his hands, driving him to steady his

footing by gripping George's milky thighs in a harsh grip.

"*Fuck*, George..." Dream grunted in between his lips when he felt the pad of George's thumb lap over the slit of his head.

George pulled away, wrapping his free hand lightly around Dream's throat while the other rid him of his pants before pulling out a condom from the pocket of the silky shirt he'd stolen from Dream.

"What..." Dream caught the condom through a lidded gaze, breathlessly asking, "...when did you?" He glazed over the wrapper that George brought to his teeth to rip open.

George smirked, blowing the torn-off wrapper into the sink. "When you were talking to your brother—"

"Please do not speak of him right now." Dream knocked his forehead against George's shoulder, an involuntary jerk of his hips as he pushed his cock against George's inner thigh.

George chuckled at that, causing Dream to send him a half-glare when he pulled his head away from his shoulder, leaning his palms into the edge of the counter for support. George gave his throat a small jut, keeping Dream's head up and his gaze fixed on him as he brushed the pad of his thumb over Dream's bottom lip.

"You're so pretty." George tugged his bottom lip, Dream could barely focus on the sound of George filing the condom out of the wrapper until he felt it rib him. "You gonna give me what I want, Dream?" Dream strangled his moan in the column of his throat, staring George down through a hooded gaze. "Asked you a question."

Dream lifted one hand from the edge of the counter to return it to George's thigh, "I heard you," squeezing so hard it had George rutting against the slab of marble, his calves pushing Dream's lower half against his bulge. "My King." Earning an open-mouthed smirk from George at the title, Dream gave one in return as he brought his free hand to George's bare waist.

George nudged his head back before re-engaging their kiss, slow and lethargic, as was the rhythm of his hips when he began rolling them against Dream. The moment George's hands returned in their strokes around his cock, Dream assisted him in his grinding motions, deriving breathy sighs from George and sharp pains in his shoulder blades from his fingernails.

Moving the hand around Dream's neck to grip the back of his head, George groused, "I know you're confident in yourself when it comes to this, Dream." He captured his bottom lip between his teeth, tugging onto it and keeping their eyes locked. "So," He leaned his forehead against his. "Do me a favour?"

Dream readjusted his grip around his thighs to yank him flush against his chest, emanating a gasp and an instinctive urge to roll his hips against his. The near-nakedness of Dream's cock brushed up against George's bulge, urging George to addictively rut himself up against him.

Working his lips in the curve of George's neck, Dream slid his hands up to the waistband of his boxers, slipping it off entirely as George happily complied.

"Lie down, Your Majesty." Dream ordered against his jaw.

George chuckled knowingly through a hum, arms slipping off from where they were slung over his shoulders; lying down on the counter, George was completely exposed—except for the way Dream's shirt fit largely over the small of his frame.

Sporting a smirk, George brought one delicate hand to Dream's bare chest, running it down until he wrapped his fingers around his cock; bringing his free hand to wrap around his own which sat rigidly pink against his stomach. Hungry brown eyes drove to where George watched himself line his hole with Dream's tip, bottom lip pulled between his teeth with starving anticipation.

Dream squeezed his thighs, eyes raking over George's body because—George raw and naked was one thing, but with the addendum of him wearing his shirt was screwing with Dream so bad he wondered how he was going to last more than a minute fucking him the way George wanted to be fucked.

"You like me in your shirt, do you?" George propped himself on his elbows, purposely grinding against Dream's prodding tip as he barely stroked himself.

Dream slid one hand up from his thigh to the back of it before lifting it slowly, setting George's calf on his shoulder as he teased him with his tip, revelling in the hand George brought to his own fringe, his dick sitting back on his stomach in aching hunger, involuntarily grinding against Dream.

"Next time," Pressing a delicate, wet kiss onto his propped up calf, Dream veered his gaze to George as he spoke against the damp skin, "Don't ask for permission," He drew his lips inches down, *another kiss*, "Wear my clothes whenever you want," He leaned down slightly, dragging the bed of his tongue to the bottom of George's inner thigh, earning a moan from George who increased the rhythm of his pumps. "You know how it makes me feel."

George stifled a whine, speaking through a strained throat, carousing at the feel of Dream's lips inching up his inner thigh. "How does it make you feel?"

"Like you're mine." Dream admitted through a small grunt, inching his tip into George, watching the small wince accompanied by a drawled-out breath.

Dream grazed his teeth over the skin at George's inner thigh, the tightness around the head of his cock sending his brain into overdrive, especially with George lowering himself down in greed.

"Fuck, Dr'm—" A gasp stole the syllables from him as Dream pushed half of himself in, enough to have George wriggle against the marbled counter. "—oh my god." He breathed out, palms flat on Dream's stomach as he looked down where pleasure filled him in painstakingly slow.

Biting down on the muscle of his thigh, Dream glimpsed up at him: *flushed and crimson cheeks*, "Are you?" He croaked out before kissing the bitten skin. "Mine?"

George bucked his hips, craving more of him. "Yes, y—...holy shit," Dream squeezed his thighs, inching in more of himself, relishing at the squirms and pretty pleasurable noises leaving George's parted lips. "You have me."

"Good." Dream breathed out against his skin before bringing his lips against George's, barely having time to catch them as he bottomed out.

George's arms were quick to grasp for support around Dream's shoulders as he adjusted to his length. Dream allowed him time to do so before his hips worked in tandem with his.

George whimpered, fingernails digging in the dip of Dream's back as he jerked against him. "Please—go faster."

With every thrust, the more relentless and the more ruthless, George's moans augmenting to near yells as it bounced off the walls—Dream's mind was so lost in the sound and feel of George that he could care less whose ears picked up on the lewdly projected dins against the tiles and marble;

their skins engaged in merciless rhythms as mediating sighs echoed between them for minutes that felt like seconds.

“I’m close—” George gasped when Dream slowly drew out only to ram back in, knocking a breath out of the both of them as their foreheads knocked. “—don’t stop,” Picking up his pace, somehow more ruthless than before, George’s moans cut through his words. “Dream...*fuck*.”

George rolled his head back and Dream took that time to lean back entirely, drinking in the sight of George, sprawled and absolutely fucked out—on the brink of euphoria and eyes rolled to the back of his head.

Dream purposely thrust back in, aiming for his prostate before beginning a pitiless course of jabs against that very spot that had George reaching for the edge of the counter for support, hiding his eyes in the crevice of his elbow as his moans disappeared into hoarse whimpers and yells.

Reaching his high, George’s calf slid from Dream’s shoulder to immediately wrap around Dream’s hips, tightening with the release of his cum as it toiled out onto his chest in glistening innocence.

The corrupted sight of George rendered two more sloppy, but inexorable thrusts from Dream before he hung his head, filling in the condom as he came undone—hands so tight around George’s thighs he most definitely left imprints.

Digging his palms on either side of George on the counter, Dream pulled out, growing weak in his stance. He felt indolent arms snake his neck, pulling him in without much force as soft thighs pressed themselves into his sides.

“You okay?” Dream asked against his cheek before pressing a light kiss, earning a nod from George. “Fuck...” He felt lazy lips against his neck, urging his next breathless suggestion, “...let’s clean you up, yeah?”



Though they had slept together before, and George *had* gone down on him, so that shouldn’t have felt like their first. But Dream had a feeling every intimate moment spent with George *would* always feel untried.

Dream glanced over his shoulder when George had seemingly lagged behind him on their way back to the study—tending his hand out with a small smile, George glanced down at it before interlacing their fingers, meeting Dream with a grin as he fell into his side, wrapping his free hand around Dream’s forearm in the process.

“You have me.” I have you.

So,

George let go of his hand when they re-entered the room, making a bee-line for the piano as he slid onto the stool.

Why does it not feel like I do?

He flashed a grin at Dream, digging his palms on either side of him onto the stool as he asked, “Let’s play?”

Dream huffed through a smile, head tilted to the side. “*How* are you not tired?”

George sent him a look. “You just fucked me senseless on your kitchen counter,” A laugh sputtered past Dream’s lips which he quickly covered with his fist. “Sleep is the *last* thing on my mind right now.”

“Aren’t you...” Dream shrugged as he walked over, taking a seat beside him. “...sore—” Earning a laugh that he, too, fell into, Dream concluded, “—and in need of rest?”

“I have to do things, remember?” George said as if anything he was saying earlier made any sense—at least to Dream—*because it didn’t*.

“George, I still don’t know what you mean—”

“Good. Don’t try to figure it out.” George brought his eyes back to the ivory keys. “Chopin, right?”

“Yeah—”

“Alright, check this out.” George tapped a few keys, giving no premise for the flawless composition he was about to deliver.

Dream wasn’t sure if it was the unknown source behind his rush of adrenaline that seemed to have lasted a full twelve hours now, at least, or the years of practice he’s had, but George’s hand hit every single note at such a rapid pace and Dream could barely keep up.

In fact, Dream hasn’t been able to keep up with him since the day started. And another day had begun, somewhat, and Dream was still behind—far from ever being able to catch up, at this rate.

Minutes of pure perplexion but an immense amount of awe passed by as Dream watched George’s fingers dance over the keys like he could do this with his eyes closed.

The melody came to a slow stop with George’s ghosting fingers over the keys, “Voilà,” He beamed, looking up to his right where Dream watched him with wide eyes and parted lips. “Impressed?”

“Is that a serious question?”

George laughed, cupping Dream’s face before placing a kiss that stole whatever air was left from Dream’s lungs before pulling away. “Wanna go for round two?”

Dream nearly choked on his spit. “You better mean another composition—”

George kissed him again. “That’s funny.”

Another kiss was attempted but Dream drew away, gently cradling his face to warningly say, “George...”

George rolled his eyes. “I just...can’t get enough of you—”

“Okay, c’mon now,” Dream spoke half-seriously, hence George’s compliance when he caught his look. “What’s going on—”

“I told you I don’t know—”

“Except you do know.” Dream cut him off indefinitely. “And I need to know, as well.”

“Why?” George’s eyes flitted across his features. “You scared?”

Yes. Dream shook his head. "I just wanna know what's going on in your head."

"You wanna know what I'm thinking?" George reiterated but the way in which he asked sounded as if Dream had fucked up for asking. "I'm about to recite something, you must listen to *every* word. Or you're not gonna get it, got it?" He waited for Dream's response, which was a slow nod. "Dream. I need to hear you say yes—"

Dream burst out into a small giggle. "Fuck, yes, I'll listen to every word—"

"—Good." George tapped his cheek before placing two hands on Dream's shoulders, "Old captain!" standing up on the stool, and then on the piano, "It is time! Let's weigh—"

"Oh my *God*—George, what are you—" A laugh bubbled past Dream's lips *because what the fuck was he doing?* "—you're...so—"

"If you say 'weird', I'll be hurt." George glanced down at him from where he stood.

Dream squinted at him before tilting his head to the side, unconvinced. "You don't care about the opinions of others enough to get hurt, George."

George giggled, crouching down and leaning his weight onto his palms where he perched over the piano to incline his face to Dream's. "I care about...*your* opinion."

A smile beamed through Dream's face. "Yeah?—"

"Yes, but can it wait?" George rolled his eyes, earning another trim laugh from Dream. "You're interrupting—"

"Yes, of course. Sincerest apologies." Dream dwindled his hand atop the piano. "Stage is all yours, my King."

George nearly stood back up but did a double-take at the name before a blush crept up his face, only augmenting in hue when Dream sent him a wink.

"Let's weigh anchor!"

Dream scoffed a curt laugh, shaking his head at him with a small smile.

"This Kingdom wearies us, Oh Death!"

And the second that line had been spoken, Dream's entire body ceased in his seat.

You both tweaked out the exact same word, too.

Because he'd heard this before, spoken drunkenly from his mother's frail voice as she twirled Dream around in this very space, delivering every word from the recited poem as they danced to the song playing on the record player.

It wasn't until years later that Dream truly understood; it wasn't her proclaiming her love for her favourite poem, but rather, a cry for help.

"Pour out your poison that it may refresh us!" George giggled, twirling around on his footing, nearly toppling over—Dream watched him carefully, half-scared and half-worried. "This fire burns our brain so fiercely, we wish to plunge to the abyss' depths," He bit his lip to stop a wide grin, spreading out his arms as he spoke to the ceiling, "Heaven *or* Hell! Does it matter?" He glanced down at Dream expectantly.

“George—”

“—To the depths of the Unknown to find something new!” And as George spoke his last words, taking voluntary steps backwards, Dream was already rising from his seat.

It was a blur, from the moment which he lurched from his stool to catch George when he willingly fell back off of the piano, landing harshly in Dream’s arms, bridal-style.

George slipped out of his hold, landing on his feet. “You lied to me.”

Dream was so perplexed and shocked that he couldn’t find the words to respond.

“You said you weren’t scared, but you are.”

Dream flailed a hand at the piano. “You could’ve gotten *severely* injured from that fall—could’ve maybe even *died*, George—if you had fallen the wrong way.”

“I know.” George nonchalantly said, so much so it sounded like he had said, “*That was the point.*”

And following that poem, Dream knew that the assumption was exactly what George meant to say.

“And that’s not what I meant by you being scared.”

Dream, admittedly, was a little annoyed. “What?”

George brushed past him. “You’re scared of me.”

Dream turned on his heel to face him. “I’m scared *for* you.”

George chuckled. “Same difference.” He plopped down the couch, pressing his elbows on his knees and dropping his face in his hands.

Dream walked over to George, crouching down in front of him before sighting out, “George, what the fuck is going on?”

Sinking his hands from his face, George groaned. “I don’t *know*, Dream.”

“If you took something, you can tell me. I’m not gonna shun you for it, George.”

“I didn’t,” George’s voice went frail as he stared back into worried green irises with the same feeling. “That’s exactly why I’m scared.” He brought shaky hands to Dream’s face, who only stared back, puzzled. “Why do I feel like I’m going to die, Dream?”

Dream frowned, covering his hands with his own as he shook his head. “You’re not dying.”

George slipped his hands from his face, sliding off the couch just as Dream sat back on his ankles, so George could fall onto his lap.

Lazily throwing his arms around him, George mumbled onto his shoulder, “I think I want to sleep now.”



Dream rose with the sun a few hours after he’d gone to sleep with an arm draped over George’s middle.

Met with the chocolate curls fanned over the white of his pillowcase, Dream fought the urge to press a soft kiss into George's hair for fear of waking him up. *God knows you need the rest.*

That was six in the morning. So, Dream let him sleep for a little more.

Then came nine A.M and Dream was less so worried about missing their practice and more so worried about George's needed attendance for collective breakfast.

Following his shower, Dream kept the towel tight around his hip with one hand while he dug the other into the mattress, bending down to land a kiss into George's hair.

"George," He softly beckoned.

A mere stir. George tugged the covers over him slightly, nuzzling further into the bed.

"Alright, sleepyhead." Dream smiled down at him. "As much as you should compensate for the hours of sleep that you lost, it's almost ten. You've missed collective breakfast."

"Don't care."

Dream's smile wavered. It wasn't news that George didn't give two fucks about kingship duties, but his voice was hoarse and groggy—something Dream could've easily dismissed because he'd maybe just woken up, but in comparison to how hyper he was last night, this just didn't sit right with him.

"Your father might, though, no?" Dream knelt onto the bed, caging one arm over George's head, attempting to get a look at his face.

George nestled his head into the pillow as a response. *Wordless, as usual.* Dream ran a hand through his hair before getting up from the bed.

He was just tired, Dream told himself as he kept stealing glances at George's unmoving body while getting dressed for personal practice. *This isn't what happened to mom in her last few days.*



It was two in the afternoon when Dream returned from collective lunch and practice, finding George in his bed, in the exact same spot he was in—*hours* ago.

Dream walked over to the edge of the bed. "Yo, it's almost three o'clock." Irritation was clear in his tone, followed by a remorseful sigh.

Exaggeration of time stated his uneasiness—*because this was starting to get a little too fucking familiar.* So much so that the sheer correlation was making Dream nauseous. Especially when he noticed that George's lashes fluttered as he stared blankly at Dream's side table.

You've been awake.

"Can you..." Dream bit his lip—*don't lose your shit.* "...talk? To me? Can you say something?"

George blinked, recoiling within the covers. "Don't wanna talk."

Empty tone, nothing promising.

Dream relented a breath. *This was it.* His jaw set, eyes drawing to the ground. *This was happening for a second time with a person so different in physicality yet so similar in their anguish.*

“George...” Dream started quietly, climbing into bed, almost taken aback when George turned to face him. “...hey,” His hands nuzzled his face, heart aching at the sight of a pale countenance drained of its life and colour as George avoided eye contact. “...what’s going on with you?”

George’s eyes fluttered shut, an imperceptible wince flashed in his features as Dream brushed the pad of his thumb over his cheekbone.

“You’ve been sleeping for twelve hours, George.” Dream hesitantly stated as his gaze fluctuated over every inch of his face, searching for an answer in desperation.

“So...tired...Dream.” George’s brows pinched together. “I just...” Almost voiceless. “...wanna stay here,” He slicked his lips, keeping his eyes shut. “Sleep with you.”

Dream pressed his lips into a thin line, slowly nodding. “Okay,” He hushed, resting his forehead against George’s. “Okay, we can do that—”

“—And never wake up.”

The pad of Dream’s thumb halted in its caress, gaze frozen in slight fear over George’s resting features.

George concluded, through a broken whisper, “Don’t wake me up.”



Cold was George’s skin against his palm as he continued to caress him. *Unmoving* was George’s body for the next two hours as he lied down with him and watched him sleep. *Broken* was all Dream could see when he spent so long warily studying every inch of him, he felt like he was hallucinating a visual of George’s soul.

It was almost three in the afternoon when Dream entered his room and almost five in the evening when George moved an inch since they lied together.

“Hi.” Dream hushed when he received George’s sullen gaze for a nanosecond before he lost it to the duvet covers *once again*.



It was seven in the evening when Dream checked the time and returned his eyes to be met with the top of George’s head as his face remained hidden in his chest. *Cold, unmoving, broken*.

A knock sounded at the door and Dream was just about ready to annihilate the person standing behind until he swung it open to reveal Sapnap.

Sapnap seemed unimpressed as he glimpsed past Dream. “You wanna flip a switch in this bitch, it’s so dark—”

Dream brought his index finger to press against his lips as he shot him a look.

Sapnap almost seemed offended until a smirk wrote over his lips. “Is someone in here with you? Is it perhaps the *King* of Salacia?” He winked.

Dream stared back at him before giving him a small nod.

Sapnap’s smirk disappeared the longer he allowed himself to read Dream’s expression. “Fuck’s up with you?”

Dream sighed before jutting his chin to the hallway, Sapnap abided as Dream shut the door behind them.

Crossing his arms over his chest, Dream recollected himself; eyes glazing over the floor while he could see Sapnap in his peripheral patiently waiting.

“I think George is going through the same thing as my mom.” Was all Dream had to say to reel a sharp breath from Sapnap. “Remember that night I had to physically drag her out of the pub and we both had to sneak her past Sebastian, but failed ‘cause she caused a scene?” Looking at Sapnap and earning a half nod, Dream continued, “Fuck—he’s been up all night, I don’t think I’ve ever seen him *that* alive, ever—speaking in riddles and poems and shit, and I,” He breathed out shakily, running a hand through his hair as he heard Sapnap mutter a curse word under his breath. “Then we went to bed and he’s been sleeping ever since.”

Sapnap’s mild fidgeting halted. “Like...how many hours?”

“Fuck, I don’t know—twelve? Fifteen, now, actually.” Dream motioned at the door with his hand. “Nick, I don’t know what to do. And I *want* to help him, you know? He’s trying to push me away, I can tell, but he’s always helped *me*—I never fucking ask him to, so I just wanna be there for him, I ___”

“Okay, okay.” Sapnap drew a flat line with his hands before taking in a deep breath. “Jesus fuck—” He huffed out before placing a firm hand on his shoulder. “Look, you’re just gonna have to force him to talk. I know it’s not gonna be easy for either of you, but, Dream, dude,” He bit his bottom lip, glancing at the door before lowering his gaze onto Dream. “If you’re saying it’s the same shit then...we both know you don’t have much time.”



Aside from Punz, Sapnap was the only other person to know what had happened to Violette. Everyone was told that she suffered a fatal disease, incurable. But in reality, it was her condition. And though George didn’t show any signs of that up until last night, it was treading a little *too* close the longer the hours progressed.

And from experience, Dream knew he was at a loss for time.

So scurrying back into his room, Dream drew the curtains, allowing the setting sun to bathe his room in an orange hue—Vulcan’s Summer biome serving for good in need of rejuvenation. George didn’t seem to think so when he groaned, pulling the covers over him.

“What the fuck are you doing?” George grumbled into the pillow.

“Alright, let’s go.” Dream clapped his hands, walking over to where George lied as he gripped the duvet covers, ready to rip them off until George held onto them just as tight. “George—”

“I’m not going anywhere—”

“You are.” Dream simply stated before releasing the covers and taking a seat beside him. “Look, I don’t know what’s going on with you—not really. But we need to get out of here, okay? We need to wake you up—and I know you don’t want that, I know you wanna sleep, but this is gonna do you good. I promise—”

“No, Dream—”

“Here’s what we’re gonna do,” Dream grabbed his wrist and pinned them on either side of his

head. “We’re going—” He searched for George’s eyes, receiving them reluctantly. “—we’re *going* to practice, then we’ll get some food in us, and then we’ll shower it all off, and *then* we can sleep, okay?”

George tried to release his wrists from his hold. “No—”

“Yes—”

“*Stop...*” George whimpered through a whisper before desisting all attempts to free himself from Dream’s hold.

Dream’s grip loosened around his wrists and George immediately scrambled to sit up against the headboard—*and then he broke down in tears.*

Face hidden in his palms as his body shook uncontrollably, George allowed Dream to fervently pull him into his arms; hands quick to the back of his head, the other on the opposing bicep as he held him like letting go would be criminal.

Muffled, but audible enough for Dream to decipher, George said, “I’m sorry.” He dropped his hands from his face, taking refuge in the crook of Dream’s neck before fisting his training shirt. “I’m sorry.” He repeated through a half-choked sob. “I’m so sorry—”

“It’s okay,” Dream began, frantic, but pumping calmness in his tone for reassurance as he pulled George against him. “It’s okay,” He repeated over George’s relentless sorries.

Repetition of “*It’s okay*”s and “*I’m sorry*”s ping-ponged between them until George’s tears slowly ceased with the dissipation of his voice, Dream holding the last word and not stopping even if George was no longer apologizing.

“It’s okay.” Dream hushed, placing kisses atop his head. “You’re okay.”

George’s hands dropped from Dream’s shirt but kept his entire weight leaning into him.

“Fuck, George, you have to tell me what’s going on.” Dream spoke against his hair.

George whimpered; it sounded *pained* and helpless. “I really want to drink.”

Dream sucked in a sharp breath as his eyes quivered shut at the admittance he feared would be true.

“And I know how much it’s gonna hurt my father, and Quackity, and how I’d be letting everyone down like I always do—but it hurts, Dream, it *hurts* so much—it’s so cold and—I’m sorry I’m doing this to you, too. I *want* to be good, but I can’t—I can’t do it, I’m sorry—”

“It’s okay.” Dream soothed circles onto his back, pressing feather-light kisses onto his shoulder. “It’s okay—just, hey,” He pulled away, George’s hands returned to his shirt, clutching the neckline of it as tears stained his face. “Just tell me what you need? Okay?” He gently cupped George’s face, forcing his eyes onto him. “Anything you—”

“Drugs,” George breathed out shakily. “Please—I need to get high, Dream. I need it,” He grabbed Dream’s face, pressing their foreheads with fervour as he lamented, “I need to get high, I—”

“I can’t give you that, George.” Dream replied through a defeated sigh, hands loosening around his face. “I can’t—”

“Please...?” George’s voice cracked down to a whisper, eyes blinking shut in despair.

“I’m sorry, I can’t.” Dream’s words strained through his throat as he fought back tears. “What else, George? There has to be *something* else.”

George sniffled, eyes screwing shut before he broke into a quiet sob. “Karl.” He puled. “I need Karl.”



“*What’s this shit?*” George had asked from underneath him, one evening in the atelier.

Karl was straddling his torso, sorting through the packets of crushed crystals and churned herbs that were strewn over his lap and George’s chest. “*What are you—*” His eyes went wide at the white crystals tucked in a clear baggie that George held up to his face, which he quickly snatched out of his grasp. “*—that is something you are never going anywhere near.*”

“*What?*” George half-whined as he propped himself up on his elbows, resting his cheek on Karl’s thigh. “*You’re making it sound like it could fuck me up.*”

“*Bingo.*” Karl chuckled, bopping his nose, causing George to scrunch it at the touch.

“*You can’t say that,*” George, persuasive and luring as always, pressed a kiss atop his thigh. “*And then,*” He kissed his other thigh before sitting up, wrapping his arms around Karl’s waist before pulling him so he sat directly on his crotch. “*Tell me I can’t have it,*” He rested his chin against Karl’s chest, sporting a pout. “*You know I like being fucked up.*”

Karl slung his arms over his shoulders, adjusting himself ever-so-slightly to avoid any sort of friction from where George had him situated on his lap. “*Yeah...you like it a little too much, handsome.*”

“*No such thing as too much when it comes to drugs.*”

Karl scoffed, un-straddling him as he fully stood up. “*Well, when it comes to that drug,*” He wiggled the seized drugs in the air before tossing them in the basket where he kept his supplies. “*There is something called ‘too much’.*”

“*Yeah?*” George asked, unconvinced. “*Enlighten me.*”

“*George, if you’re cloyed by Mephemeta,*” Karl smirked, crossing his arms over his chest as he leaned his hip into the counter. “*Neither my mom nor I can revive you.*”

When George playfully rolled his eyes at the statement, Karl knew he wasn’t at all fazed—when he should have been. *But George couldn’t care less about being revived.*

So when Dream showed up at the door of the atelier, George pale and half-asleep in his arms, Karl *couldn’t* help—he was frantic in helping them in, nonetheless—but *he couldn’t help*. If the measures were as drastic as they seemed in Dream’s sulking features and George’s paleness, it was out of Karl’s hands.

And as he studied George when carrying him to bed after supplying him with medicinal tea, Karl *knew*. He knew for a fact that George was aware of a ‘no way out’, reminded of it when the remnants of Mephemeta ate away at his core. *And he didn’t care.*

Because George wasn’t scared to die.

Hence why he'd chosen that precise packet out of all the others that day he snuck into Karl's supplies—the day George had reached his limit. The day George was ready to crash for good.



When Karl stepped out of the room where George lay soundlessly asleep, he caught a glimpse of Dream: pacing with one arm crossed over his chest while the other was folded so he could anxiously bite on his knuckle.

All nervous inclinations ceased the moment he met Karl's eyes. "Is he gonna be okay?" He walked over to him and Karl made a point to side-step so as to avoid him. "Tell me he's gonna be good."

"I would," Karl calmly stated as he walked past his desk and towards the stove. "If I could."

"What the *fuck* is that supposed to mean?" Dream growled, yet stayed put despite his uneasiness.

"It means," Karl whirled around, unable to keep his temper at bay. "I have no clue how to assess this *yet*, so you're gonna have to fucking *relax* until I do."

Dream took an imperceptible step back, looking Karl up and down before he apologetically bowed his head. Karl shot him a glare, turning around and moving the kettle onto the stovetop, palms digging into the edge of the counter for support as he tautened a breath.

It wasn't fair to take it out on him, Karl knew that much. But he was getting *real* fucking tired of having to deal with George's downfall, especially because he wasn't around to stop it from getting this concerning. And because George was spending countless nights with Dream instead of the three of them.

Was he jealous? A little. Was he worried that he wouldn't know how to pull George out of this? Definitely—*most fucking definitely*.

And fear laced with jealousy never stirred up a good outcome.

What was worse was *knowing* the preset fear that Dream held.

Karl had heard about Dream's mother through his own. As for whatever happened between Violette and Felicity, Karl wasn't sure, but it was the main reason for most of the arguments between his parents—possibly also the last thing that sent his father away.

Violette, now that Karl came to think of it, was a lot like George—granted, she had an actual condition whereas George was just, *well*, irreversibly rageful against the Kingdom for his own prejudice. But nevertheless, their hatred for 'living' prompted their craving for escapism through drugs.

And now, it led them to the exact same position: the cloy behind the detrimental effects of Mephemeta.

"I just want to understand what's happening with him." Dream said, quietly, but loud enough that it ripped Karl out of his thoughts.

Turning away from the stove, Karl slanted his back into it to face Dream. "Doesn't a piece of you already know?"

Dream's shoulders drew down with his exhale. "I was hoping it wasn't that."

Karl offered him a sympathetic smile.

For their mothers being relatively close, he and Dream never bothered to become friends themselves. And in this small moment of realization thanks to their link with not only their mothers but George, as well, Karl's irritation towards the blonde ceased to exist when he caught his surly green eyes.

"Have a seat, Prince Clay," Karl sighed, turning around to displace the kettle onto an unlit grill. "We have some catching up to do."

"George—"

"—Is going to be fine." Karl wasn't sure of *that*, it showed in his tone, but—"I'm going to make sure of it." Was the most certain thing he's ever said.

Especially 'cause this concerned *George*.



"I'm assuming that's why my mother and Sebastian never got along well." Karl smiled against the rim of his mug, steam swirling up as it momentarily blinded his gaze.

Dream clicked his tongue, a weak smile playing at his lips. "Name one person who got along well with my father—" When Karl opened his mouth to speak, Dream added, "—without it being forced, or conductive code."

Karl pressed his lips into a line, shaking his head once. "Never mind."

Small talk was hard, which is perhaps why diving straight into the depths of their interlinked connections that brought them together came easier. Karl explained the situation between Felicity and Violette, how it might've been more than a regular friendship—whatever it was, Karl didn't care to know specifics.

A small silence passed them following their shared smile, even if it was slightly forced given their current situation—sitting in between four walls, which contained another room where a boy they were both in love with lay painfully asleep.

"He told me he didn't take anything." Dream suddenly said, circling the rim of his mug with the pad of his finger, green irises lost in the steaming tea leaves. "But he was so..." He half-wincing until offering a shrug.

Karl pursed his lips to the side before leaning into the table. "Hyperactive?" He quirked an eyebrow when Dream glimpsed across the table and at him. "Hyper...sexual?" Dream quickly looked away, causing a light smile to curve Karl's lips. "Talkative?" He cocked his head to the side, re-meriting Dream's gaze. "Essentially...everything that George isn't, right?"

"So, he *did* take something." Dream defeatedly sighed.

"Not *exactly*," Karl tipped back in his seat, eyes trailing to the cupboard where he kept his supplies. "Not last night, at least."

Dream shifted in his seat, nursing the mug he had yet to take a drink from. "What do you mean?"

Karl glanced at him before letting out a small sigh. "Before we bumped into each other in the village, the night before..." He trailed off, Dream nodded—eager to just know the source of

George's detrimental state. "...he came to my atelier—left before I could offer him help for when he pretended to be sick. Then he stole something from my supplies, something he knew would grant him exactly what he wanted to achieve that night." He narrowed his eyes on Dream. "Prince Clay—"

"—Dream's fine." He quickly chimed in, his attentive expression still grasping for closure.

Karl nodded. "Dream...that night, George wasn't..." He bit his bottom lip, deriving his stare to the mug. "...wasn't planning on—"

"Waking up." Dream said, mostly to himself, it seemed as Karl looked at him, slightly surprised, only to find the blonde staring worriedly at the table. "Shit." He whispered, disgusted with the marinating thought in his head. "That's why he's acting like this, then?" He shrugged, looking over at Karl. "He's, what, facing a comedown of some sort?"

"Of some sort." Karl teetered the idea in his head. "The drug he took, and I'm assuming in large amounts—*concerningly* large—with the goal he had that night, was and is the most dangerous to Waterborns and Fireborns, for the exact reason he's in the situation he's in right now." The seat creaked underneath Karl's weight as he got comfortable. "I'm gonna get into the specifics of the alchemy behind what he took, so I'll need you to follow along, okay? I can dumb it—I was gonna say dumb it down, but I don't want to offend—"

"Please do, Prince Karl." Dream huffed. "I know fuck all about Alchemy."

Karl smiled softly before carrying on. "This drug, Mephemeta, *attacks* the brain and nervous system. Like a pile of bricks. With the crystallines from the crushed crystal itself remaining in his system for a total of forty-eight hours, George has *been* high since the initial dose. In fact, when he was thrown into that situation with Quackity almost *literally* dying," He shot a look at him, Dream gave an apologetic one in return. "He was still high, just too shook to the core to actually enjoy the drug as a stimulant. Instead, it only intensified his grief."

"Okay, but he...he was fine when Quackity was being brought back home." Dream's brows knitted as he began to piece his memories with George together.

"Probably, yeah, but...Mephemeta's comedown is sort of, like, the calm before the storm—and for Waterborns and Fireborns, that storm annihilates everything in its path. With Mephemeta attacking the emotions before anything else, and you guys being from the Emotional spectrum—it uses your powers against you. You know how you can't *really* use your powers when you're drunk or high? This is what happens here—it builds up and builds up and stays pent up until, eventually, in George's case, the water turns into ice and pretty much...freezes over everything within him."

Dream interlocked his hands, pressing them tightly against his mouth as his eyes fluttered shut. "That's what he meant when he said he was cold."

"Yeah...literally, and spiritually." Karl clicked his tongue, earning a hardened gaze. "Dream, George is...his blood is turning into ice. And...I know you've met him before he started opening up to you? Before it was all a facade—this tough guy act, pretending that nothing affects him..." He slicked his lips. "...this time, that act will be an actuality. He won't be able to feel a thing. He'll be as he has been all day today—either asleep or deadly alive—you'd be...you'd be lucky to get a single word out of him a day."

Dream's hands slowly slipped from where they covered his mouth. "How long...is he gonna be that way?"

Karl swallowed, gaze fixed onto him, not knowing how blatant to be. “It’s the same as your mother, Your Highness.”

Dream let out an exasperated sigh as he leaned back into his chair, eyes cast to the ground in defeat as he heard a muted “forever” in Karl’s statement.

Karl studied him; Dream’s beaten look—a man forcing the white flag down—*because you don’t wanna give up on him, do you?*

“How do we fix him?” Dream rasped.

You’re not going to give up.

Karl allowed the word to dally on his tongue; for fear that speaking it too loudly would grant him all the remorse if it *didn’t* work out, if *something* went wrong in the process, causing him to lose the life of his best friend, as well as an innocent being who was just trying to help.

But allowing the whisper to carry out enough that it rested between his lips, Karl said, “Metanoia.”

The moment Dream’s eyes skimmed up to meet his, Karl cowered in his seat, arms crossed over his chest.

“I would advise *against* it, though, Dream.” Karl shook his head defiantly.

Dream stared him down. “It’s not like we have a choice—but, fuck—even then, like, who’s to say it’s gonna work? It wasn’t effective for my mom.”

Karl, then, paused on his countenance because—“What?”

Dream lifted an eyebrow. “What?”

“What do you mean it didn’t work for your mom? It works for everybody. It’s the most powerful healing method to exist in this Kingdom.”

“If it worked, she’d still be here.” Dream deadpanned.

Karl trod lightly, but something told him that Dream wasn’t made aware of the whole truth—a truth Karl wouldn’t have felt entitled to say, were it not for the identity of the third party involved.

“It *would’ve* worked if she’d done it in the first place.” Karl measured his tone, for Dream wasn’t the one who deserved any sort of attitude. “It takes a Waterborn to assist a Fireborn in Metanoia and vice-versa. Anthea offered, but was declined, so—”

Dream rose in his seat. “My mom had the option to get help and she *refused* it?”

“*She* didn’t.” Karl watched the vigour rise in Dream’s glare, almost having him recoiling in his seat as he fought to say, “Your father did.”

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the delay lads that's my bad. but here's 12k words to make up for it (im back on my Walls bs).

and to think this chapter was supposed to go on for another 5k words. yikes. 20 chapters is looking like it's not gonna be enough.

& cause why not: [met!george](#) centric playlist for our little angsty self-destructive king

anyway, thank u for the nice, as always. hope ur well, till the next one x (:

The Only Thing

Chapter Notes

i, like, barely edited this. soz x.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



Dream never got a full night's sleep when he was younger—almost always interrupted in the middle of the night by his mother who wanted to either stargaze, listen to records or read books, all in his company.

Stargazing was something they did often. Dream didn't understand why until later—until the morning following *that* night.

“God, aren't they so pretty?”

Dream snickered. *“They're just stars.”*

She lightly jabbed her elbow into his arm. *“You sound like your father.”*

Dream rolled his eyes at the mention of the last person they wanted to think about during the undisturbed night that was all theirs; theirs because they had to sneak around Sebastian to meet, on the account of him wanting to keep them apart.

“What do you like about them?”

“The stars?” She questioned, Dream hummed. *“I suppose it's more so that I envy them.”*

Dream scanned the twinkling dots in the dark Vulcan sky. *“What do they have that you don't?”*

“Freedom to roam.” An answer so instinctive—brainless. *“They're up there while we're...stuck down here.”*

Dream turned his head to look at her. *“And you want to be up there, with them?”*

“Mhm.” She looked at him. *“And do you know how that happens?”*

Dream pursed his lips before shaking his head ‘no’.

“Promise me you'll never find out?”

Dream frowned. *“But what if I want to come with you?”*

Her chuckle was feigned as she said, *“I don't think your father would let that happen.”*

Dream scoffed. *“Shouldn't that be my choice?”*

“Oh, Dream,” She sighed, shaking her head at him. *“The choice is never yours so long as he's around, baby.”*

Dream wondered how different things would've been, had the choice been hers. If given the option to accept Anthea's help, she'd have taken it. Because although his father was a control freak, Dream wasn't sure his mother *would* have wanted to be fixed.

Because he remembered *that* night clearly—Dream felt like his memory could be wiped, but that recollection would transcend *every* time: his mother's incessant screams and thrashes as she fought to escape Sebastian's barricading arms (in the moment, and even now, Dream didn't blame him—it was the dead of night and it was following the mania that took over her brain, causing her to act lawless in the pub and then in the foyer of the palace where several soldiers and staff were fast asleep).

Dream remembered his father stating that she needed to get help, even if it was disingenuous in his ulterior motive, but Dream *remembered* her merciless, "*Let me go,*"s and "*I don't need to be fixed.*"

Dream *remembered* his father telling him to take Punz out of the room, *remembered* Sapnap close behind, ready to catch Dream if his knees gave out from underneath him, *remembered* Punz, in his innocent, young voice, asking, "*What's wrong with mom?*"

Only for him to forcefully say, "*Nothing.*"

"*Is she angry?*"

Dream, having no choice but to feed lies to assuage his worries—the big brother role always coming up in the most inconvenient times—said, "*Yes. But she'll be happy tomorrow.*"

Dream wasn't *completely* wrong. Because come tomorrow, his mother had joined the stars.

Rageful towards his father for having refused the help his mother deeply needed, the same help that *George* needed, which *he* could offer so as to not lose yet another person to this godforsaken Kingdom, Dream said to Karl, "I wanna do it."

Karl sighed, shaking his head. "Listen, I don't think it's a good idea—"

"Do you *not* want him to get better?" Dream's tone held an edge that compelled the irritation Karl previously held when he initially raised his voice at him.

"It's not that I don't want him to get better," Karl spoke through slightly gritted teeth. "It's that I don't know you well enough to trust you in being George's Metanoia link."

Dream's brows drew together. "What are you talking about?"

"Do you know the responsibility that comes in the aftermath of something as powerful as this procedure?" Karl cocked an expectant eyebrow at him. "In relieving him of the ice that's frozen over his brain, you are pumping a share of your dopamine in his system. That continues to thrive as long as you're around. If you decide you no longer want to be in his life, you would be taking that with you and he'll be right where he is *right now*—worse, actually." He barely took a breath before re-stating, "You are forming a bond with him, you guys will be linked emotionally. That on top of what you two already have, if broken, will break George beyond redemption."

"And why are you even considering the fact that I could up and leave him?"

Karl chuckled bitterly. "Jesus—you're..." He bit back his words, shaking his head. "...you've just begun to know him. Some things could come up, push you away as you grow to—"

“Worse than this?” Dream indolently pointed his hand to the door George rested behind. “You’re watching me stand by his side *through this*, after days of us only getting to know each other and you think that if—somehow—something worse comes up, I’m just going to drop him?”

Karl sighed, sinking his back into his chair. “You can’t die—if you die, you’ll be taking him down with you.”

Dream paused for a brief moment, “I won’t.” Fixing his gaze on Karl. “I will do *whatever* it takes to keep him around. I am *not* losing him.”

“He’s an addict, Dream,” Karl stated and not a single feature flinched in Dream’s countenance. “Despite Metanoia, George isn’t gonna be miraculously cleansed from his temptations. He will still have the urge to drink and get high. And—”

“And I will help him overcome it. I can handle him.” Dream asserted. “Whatever it takes, Karl.”

Karl’s parted lips held unspoken words that got interrupted by shattering glass from the room George lied in. Rushing to the alarming sound, Karl’s hand was on the doorknob of the bedroom, Dream lingered behind him—studying Karl as his shoulders dropped with defeat.

“Fuck.” Karl muttered under his breath.

“What—”

“He locked it.” Karl stepped away from the door, forehead pressed into his palm.

Dream briefly followed his movements before his eyes latched onto the doorknob, his hand meeting the brass seconds later.

“Your Highness, it’s locked—”

“George?” Dream attempted, only deriving a sigh from Karl, causing him to try the doorknob again because the sheer images that procured itself in Dream’s head after hearing the glass shatter, and now the door being purposefully locked, was making his blood boil and his heart thump in his chest. “Can you let me in?” He calmly asked, jiggling the doorknob again. “Open the door.” And maybe it was the surmounting memories of his mother constantly refusing help in her own vague ways that pushed the next words out of his mouth, but shaking the doorknob til’ it almost snapped, Dream raised his voice, “Open the fucking door, George.”

Karl tried to step in, but the moment he did, a click sounded through the hinges.

They momentarily ceased in their spots. Dream braced himself and by the breath audibly sucked in by Karl, he realized that though they had succeeded in being let in, what lied behind this slab of wood had them in crippling anticipation, for the worse.

A fleeting second passed, Dream glanced at Karl who nudged his chin at the door. “You go.”

The door was left ajar behind him as Dream progressed into the room, firstly noticing the broken pieces of glass from the window-pane; ones that seemed to have been shut by vines, from Karl—*was George attempting to escape?*

And that derived his next thought because—*where was he?*

“George?” Dream peeked his head into the joint bathroom—*empty*. “Where—”

“Should leave me while you still can.” A familiar voice; hoarse and croaked, from the ground.

Dream lightly whirled around in his step, overlooking the room until his eyes fell down to under the bed. Taking a breath and crouching down, Dream poked his head past the bed frame, welcomed with the angel-face, demonized by the effects of the drugs that were destroying him as time elapsed.

Lying on his side, knees against his chest, one hand cradling the wounded one where blood seeped past the cracks of his fingers, George stared back blankly.

“What are you doing down there?” Dream forced a smile, sitting back on his ankles, keeping his head tucked down to study him.

George’s voice was frail as he said, “Avoiding.”

“Avoiding what?”

“Everything, everyone.” *Whispered*, every syllable from that point on. “You.”

Dream exhaled quietly before lying down on his stomach, resting his head against his forearm to ease into a similar position as George. “You hurt yourself.” He narrowed his eyes on his clenched hand.

George flicked his gaze to the side of him. “Wanted to get out.”

“And go where?”

“Needed a drink.” George’s eyes fluttered weakly. “Will you get me one?”

It was asked so desperately, quietly, but so, *so* fucking hopeless that Dream almost caved.

“You know I can’t do that.”

“You can—”

“I shouldn’t.”

George furrowed his eyebrows. “Why are you still here?”

“I wanna help, George.”

“I don’t want your fucking help, d’you not get that?” Though not raising the decibels in his tone, the ice corroding every inch of his being laced itself in his words. “You can’t fucking fix me, Dream. I don’t need to be fixed—stop...trying to.”

“I can’t.”

George relented a breath. “Why?”

“Because I need you, remember?” Dream attempted with an uneasy smile. “Can’t...I can’t do this without you.”

“M’not good for you,” George said, so noiseless that Dream had almost missed it, were he not hyperfocused on every part of him. “You deserve better than this.” George swallowed. “Better than me.”

Dream tilted his head further into his forearm. “There’s no one else but you, George.”

George winced. “How can you say that?”

“Because you lost control.” Dream said smoothly like it was something that should have made sense to George—something that wasn’t as damaged as how he currently viewed himself. “And I’m not gonna run off on you because of it.”

George’s voice from that night in the Salacia kitchen swirled in his mind, “*I don’t want you to hide that from me either.*”

“And I don’t want you to hide it from me either.” Dream cemented the words with each emphasized syllable, fixing his stare into vacant brown eyes. “That’s why I’m here. That’s why I’m gonna stay and not ‘leave while I still can’,” He rejected the recited words as if it were nonsense—and *because it was*. “That’s why you stayed, right?”

“I stayed because...” George whimpered, lips curved with welling tears. “‘Cause your father’s an evil, psychotic bastard—and I stayed...” He bit his lip, a drop coursing down his cheek, Dream couldn’t help but allow his pain to mirror onto his expression. “...because I thought I could do better, that I could...give you better, but,” He shook his head. “I’m just making it worse.”

Dream wanted to ask him where he could’ve possibly gotten that idea. “*Worse?*” He nearly laughed. “Wor—George, *every* day that I have to return to that palace and face that ‘*psychotic bastard*’—carry his responsibilities on *my* shoulders—*every* time I have to go through that? A big part of me thinks about how much easier it would all be if you were right by my side.” He revelled in the sight of George; softening features as the hushed, but passionate words kissed him in reassurance. “You don’t make it worse, George. You make the air *breathable* again. Fuck, sometimes it gets *so* loud, I feel like my head’s gonna explode—but *you* make it all so fucking quiet.”

George buried his face into his blood-streaked hands. “...I thought so, too, but—” He slid his hands down his face to glance at Dream—*helpless, broken*. “You *have* to let me go.”

“I’m staying—”

“I’m *hurting* you—”

“You’re *not*.” Dream cut him off indefinitely. “Not when you’re the *one* good thing in my life.”

George screwed his eyes shut, tears spilling past. “Go away, Dream.” Cracked through a whisper—*helpless, broken*.

There was an ache in Dream’s throat that held all the tears he couldn’t release when he was staring back at this version of George. *For once*, George needed him and was convincing himself otherwise because he felt like he didn’t deserve the help—like he didn’t want it.

And maybe it was selfish, forcing help onto him, but George was too important to let go of. He *had* become too important to lose.

So, deliberately, with force, Dream shook his head. “No.” George cowered within himself, tears streaming down his face in his muted self-torture. “Let me help you.” He tended a hand out towards him, George meekly looked at it. “If not to help yourself, then to help me, okay?” He sniffled, reeling back his tears. “You told me you were gonna stay with me, right? So,” George darted his gaze up from the waiting hand to anguished green eyes. “I’m holding you to that right now.”

George drew in a shaky breath, eyes returning to the hand that Dream kept tended because there was a twinge of hope where George seemed like he was considering it, and *fuck*—was Dream holding onto that thread for dear life.

“Need you to stay, okay?” Dream couldn’t help the tear that fled past his eye. “Take my hand, George.”

It took a few seconds, skidding close to a minute before George untucked his hand from his chest, trembling as it went to meet Dream’s own.

And Dream could have sworn, through all the burns—any form of pain he’s felt in the past—that nothing compared to the one following George’s hand interlacing his. Ice that felt *scalding* when it met fire—Dream felt a shockwave rush through his body.

George must’ve felt something similar, but deriving a different response as a gasp left him followed by a greedy hold—one he was unsure of as he glimpsed up at Dream for confirmation. And though Dream felt like prolonging this touch could end in his own demise, he nodded encouragingly.

“C’mere.” Dream tugged on his hand, barely having to pull him out from under the bed before George had him pressed onto the ground.

And he could feel himself slipping out of consciousness the more George’s hand searched for what the melting ice within him yearned. Dream allowed himself to finally let go of him—no matter what, George was gonna cling on—and that’s all that mattered. Awake or not, George was going to stay. *And that’s all that mattered.*



Karl wanted to intervene the moment he saw it happen. But George was awake—and he had never looked more lethal, to himself and to others. And though there was so much to discuss still, how the aftermath and the procedure itself could cause fatal risks, he knew that was the only way, especially since the deterioration of George’s soul was occurring right before their eyes.

“You alright?” Karl knelt down to the ground, attempting to reach Dream’s attention, which was fading at a rapid pace.

Despite the broken glass stating George’s need to escape, he hadn’t made a break for it when being given the opportunity to—no, George was *famished* for Dream—gripping his arm, neck, fingernails digging into Dream’s back as he turned in his lap to straddle him; wrapping his arms around his shoulders, squeezing his frame as if his life depended on it—and *it did*.

Metanoia required coaching, but this procedure—between *Dream and George*—came naturally. *Something similar had occurred before*, Karl thought as his lips parted in wonder, watching Dream loll his head to the side, *giving and giving*, his hands smooth on the small of George’s back as if he was encouraging him to *take and take*.

This happened before—George had been ignited by Dream. And he *liked* it—or it wouldn’t have come this easy.

It had gone on for two minutes; maybe more, maybe less—Karl couldn’t tell because he was *captivated*; George knowing precisely where to place his hands to satisfy his hunger, Dream *allowing* his energy to be slowly depleted from him.

It was when Dream’s eyes began fluttering shut that Karl snapped out of his trance. “Dream—hey,

loverboy,” He couldn’t get too close to them, couldn’t snap George out of his stupor. “I need you to hold on for a little longer, alright?”

“Stovetops...turn them on...” Dream spoke through a strained voice, grimacing when George clutched at his bicep. “...and...fireplace.”

Resources. He needed to take energy from his resources, energy that he would eventually lose again, but willing as ever in his request to assist George.

Logs were frantically thrown in the fireplace and every dial of the stove was at its highest point—minutes felt like hours in the peak of Metanoia where George’s greed for the melting ice in his system derived painful grunts from Dream, and all Karl *could* do was watch. And he kept thinking that if his mother knew of this—*god he’d be so royally fucked.* Because he wasn’t trained to handle this, yet his best friend was in the middle of it, along with someone said best friend had so much care for.

Having two important lives in his hand, Karl nearly fell down to his knees from utmost relief when George crashed against Dream’s chest, followed by puffs of ash which Dream coughed up.

It should’ve been alarming but only noted the success of the procedure because every bit of fatal ice from George’s system latched onto Dream’s innate fire; clashing in and procuring the patch of thick dust that strewn Dream’s lips and scattered George’s shoulder as they passed out from overstimulation—*still* remaining in each other’s arms.

Dream, lifeless as he could be, managed to tilt George’s lips to his ear, letting out a breath of relief as he looked at Karl through a lidded gaze and faint smile. “He’s...he’s okay.”

Karl barely got his, “Thanks to you,” out before exhaustion sucked Dream into unconsciousness.



When Dream woke, he wasn’t as cold as he last remembered being, but he’d never felt this weak in his entire life. With a familiar weight on his chest and lap, he glanced down to be met with chocolate curls and ivory skin; those freckles peppered in odd spots under his eyes and cheek.

He brought a gentle hand from under the plethora of covers that sheathed their bodies, curving it around George’s face—*velvety, delicate.*

The longer he looked at him, the more all the sides and versions of George he’d witnessed in the last twenty-four hours seemed implausible in fair skin and soft resting features.

“You’re awake.” A voice spoke from a few feet away.

Dream looked up from where George’s head rested against his chest, offering him a timid smile.

“I moved you guys to the fireplace, figured you might need the heat—especially with the broken window and...” He waved off the resting words, tending a cup of warm tea towards him. “Here,” Dream carefully untucked a hand from under the covers to take it from him. “You gotta actually drink it this time.” He teased.

Maybe it was the fireplace, or George nuzzled into him, or the blankets, or Karl’s demeanour, but Dream felt inexplicably warm where he sat.

He spoke against the steam that swirled up his nostrils. “Thank you.”

Karl winked at him, getting up from where he'd crouched to seat himself on the couch. Dream had been drinking—out of courtesy because he had made Karl dump out the tea he'd previously been given. And in that time, he studied his outfit because it seemed familiar—similar to how the boy on his lap dressed; noting the rings, necklaces, and painted nails.

So, who inherited what from who? Because it seemed like a pattern, starting with the resemblance in kindness.

“*Oh*—George told me to give you this, when I first put him to bed,” Karl bucked his hips slightly as he fished into his back pocket for an item which when he pulled out to tend towards Dream, caused an immediate wave of relief: *his fucking pocketknife*. “Said he’s never seen you without it and that you were gonna leave it behind.”

Dream glanced at it from where he sat, not wanting to reach over to jostle George out of his slumber. “I was...” He shook his head, glancing over at Karl. “...I was so in my head because I wanted to make sure he was okay—I didn’t think to...grab it.”

I never told you, he wondered how or why George thought it was important to have it on him. *Despite what you were going through, you still took the time to grab it for me.*

To anybody else, it was just a tiny weapon, but to Dream, it was the sole thing that kept him from breaking into a million pieces sometimes. It was as easy as mindlessly twirling it in between his fingers for a shred of alleviation in a tense situation.

Like the conversation he had with Karl prior to Metanoia; his fingers itched for it, for the continuous motion that took away some of the concentration on the stress.

“What’s the emotional connection?” Karl jerked his chin to it before taking a sip of his tea.

“My, uh...best friend gave it to me when we were younger? I’m the blacksmith of all the weapons in the Kingdom and when I was training him, he wanted to learn how to craft weapons,” He softly chuckled at the memory. “So he crafted this. It’s a bit...scuffed, but.” An unstoppable grin of fondness for Sapnap rose in his countenance. “It was *all* him.”

“That best friend...is that...your guard? Nick?”

“Yeah. Think you’ve met him.”

“I have.” Karl nodded curtly. “Very...self-assured guy.”

“It’s a front.” Dream found himself admitting, deriving a small laugh from Karl. “He’s actually a...big-hearted idiot.”

“Hm.” Karl squinted at him with a small smile. “Sounds familiar.”

They both looked at George, unaware of his surroundings—asleep, at peace. *Just how they both wanted him to be*, it seemed, as they continued to speak in hushed and quiet tones.

“That must’ve been a lot for you.” Karl started, meriting Dream’s eyes. “Seeing him like that.”

Dream was immediately thrown back to that night with his mother, causing a stir in his position.

“Kind of went through...the same ordeal with my mom, so.” Dream cleared his throat, gaze treading back to George. “But I guess I just never expected *him* to break like that—he’s always so...quiet, you know? Apart from the last, like twenty-four hours.”

“It’s because he’s so quiet all the time that it all gets so loud when he finally cracks,” Karl mumbled out each word, Dream glanced at him to find his blue irises glazing over George’s face.

“How do you feel?” Dream asked. “I mean...he means a lot to you, clearly.”

What Dream wanted to say, or more so ask, was how he felt about George in general. It wasn’t the right time, he supposed, but when else? When else would he get to sit one-on-one with Karl?

Dream didn’t want to let that moment in his bedroom haunt him the way it had ever since George weakly spoke Karl’s name; at his lowest point, if he couldn’t have what he truly desired, the next—closest thing was *Karl*—“*I need Karl.*” He had said.

“It’s not the first time I’ve been through something like this with him,” Karl said through a sad smile.

“I should’ve guessed that.” Dream muttered with a small nod. “Something must’ve triggered the connection that made you his anchor.”

Karl almost jerked in his seat. “What?”

“He didn’t tell you?”

“No?” Karl scoffed before chuckling to himself. “That’s...” He broke into a grin, hand against his cheek, fond blue eyes reposed on George’s face. “...I mean—if he felt safe around me, yet never wanted a relationship, I guess me as his anchor makes the most sense—”

“Wait,” It was Dream’s turn to spring in his seat as he fixed Karl with his stare. “What?”

Karl bit his lip, breaking into a bashful grin. “Yeah...um. I was kind of in love with George? For... a bit.”

The fear and jealousy dwindled ever since first seeing them at Punz’s birthday; tangled in each other’s limbs, passing smoke between their nearly brushing lips like it could be assumed that they’ve kissed before. Or even the time when they slow-danced at Neptunalia. That fear and jealousy grew the longer he held the boy he was deeply infatuated with and looked into the eyes of his best friend, who’d known him for years, and had grown to love him too.

Karl must’ve noticed those emotions eating away at Dream because he giggled as he said, “Don’t worry, it was never reciprocated. And I valued our friendship way too much to let my feelings get in the way, so nothing ever really came from it.”

Dream was pensive and dead silent for a solid minute or two. Karl wasn’t looking at him either, just fiddling with the handle of his mug as he half-awaited Dream’s response, but was trailing off in his own mind.

“Did he...” Dream cleared his throat, squirming in his seat, careful not to move George too much. “...did he know? That you loved him?”

Karl glimpsed up at him, eyebrows furrowed as he momentarily looked at George. “He must have, yeah, but we both knew that it was best left unspoken. He wasn’t ready for a relationship, we had a conversation about that. Never on the basis of my feelings, but just in general. George...has a big heart, but that doesn’t mean that he was ever emotionally available for a steady relationship. He liked experimenting and didn’t like staying with one person—hated consistency. With me, he felt safe—*too* safe. That was the issue, why it never blossomed into something bigger.”

“*Are you mine?*” Dream had asked George, to which he had replied, “*You have me.*”

Was Dream too stupid to see that it might’ve been a sexually driven thought? An impulse to say so in the heat of the moment?

“But it’s different with you.” Karl’s voice swirled into his thoughts. “He’s different with you.”

“If he’s known you forever and he still wasn’t interested in you in that sense,” Dream’s brows drew together. “How would it be different with me?”

Karl’s wavering gaze held calculated words which he seemed hesitant to admit, maybe because of the unrequited love he had for his best friend, but he said, “Because, Dream,” He pursed his lips with an insuppressible smile. “What he feels for you is bigger than him. And he likes that feeling. When he’s with you, he feels like he’s taking risks. And I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but our man loves to live on the edge, likes fear—thrives off it. Thrives off that feeling you get when your stomach drops or when your heart churns so hard it sends an ache through each and every fibre in your body.” He placed his mug onto the coffee table before them, “And the rate at which the transfer of your powers onto him worked, during Metanoia, validates that like no other—George has felt you burn him before and he liked it.” *You wanted to burn, you wanted to become the flame itself.* “Otherwise, he wouldn’t have been so willing to take it from you.”

“*When you burn me...it doesn’t hurt,*” George had said that night in the Salacian kitchen. “*It makes me feel alive again.*”

Dream was defiant; refusing to believe that someone like himself could alter George’s perception of relationships. “Why does that...not sound like a good thing, though?”

Because he’s self-destructive and you’re pumping that mindset for him.

“Because it’s not good or bad.” Karl giggled. “It’s being on the brink of love.”

Love. Dream’s eyes widened slightly when he returned them to George. *No shot—George didn’t love him, did he? How could he? It was too soon to tell, right?*

“I’m not saying he *loves* you.” It was scary how Karl seemed to know exactly what was going on Dream’s head, almost like he’d been through similar motions, as well. “I’m saying you have a grip on him, one that’s so tight and scalding that it woke him from the slumber he slipped into about a decade ago.” Karl chuckled, finding amusement in the fear Dream’s gaze possessed. “Nevertheless, should things go well for you two,” He lightly threw his hands up. “I don’t see why he wouldn’t fall. Off the brink and into the endless pit of it.”

Love?

Dream’s mind was going haywire. He was only starting to realize that George’s reciprocation meant more of what had happened on that kitchen counter, more tender showers accompanied by those very touches, the feel of George’s fingers through his hair, the sound of his voice, lulling out every knot in his muscles. *Love.* The eternal promise of having him around—*of course, my Metanoia.*



There was something about losing control that George revelled in.

But only when it was followed by continuous drug intakes, which would destroy any sense of remorse accompanied by recollections of the night before.

And when George woke up, stone-cold sober, with the weight on his stomach being Dream's arm draped over his torso, his chest pressed to his back, George wanted to break into tears.

He found he's been doing that a lot lately, all for the reasons that travelled back to the same source. George brought a hand over his mouth, suppressing his silent lament as tears tainted his palm.

George remembered looking into the eyes that rested behind those shut eyelids; riddled with fear and perplexion, trying to grasp onto the words leaving his mouth—*trying to understand*. Because no matter how unreachable, *you wouldn't drop it—wouldn't let me go*.

George couldn't stop his tears and that's when he knew he was utterly fucked. Because what he felt for him was already skidding too close to love; this fearful hunger, this feeling bigger than himself—thus, a hunger that couldn't be sated.

Whatever he felt for Dream, it was growing at a rapid pace. Whatever he felt for Dream, it was scalding over fading burns that etched his soul. *Whatever I feel for you*, George cradled his face gently after slowly turning in his spot, *can barely fit within myself*.

And you need to let me go. George thought back to the tears he shed in Dream's bed and under the atelier's; the same green eyes staring back at him, desperate to keep him around. *Please don't let me go*. And that's how it always went in his mind: self-contradictory—needing Dream to let go and needing Dream point-blank.

Hurting you hurts me too much. George racked his brain, from every inch; searching for ways to apologize. But how many sorries could he say until it started to sound meaningless? How could 'sorry' efface the loss of control in the last twenty-sum hours, starting with the chaos he caused in the Vulcan palace.

George couldn't remember exactly how he felt when he was grasping for things to keep his mind busy—he just knew that he couldn't pause, otherwise, the noise would return.

A mug was nudged into his face so abruptly, it ceased the course of his tears. Looking up from the familiar tending hand, Karl smiled down at him.

"C'mon." He nodded his head to the dining table. "I'm making dinner."

George wanted nothing more than to remain in Dream's arms, but it wasn't like it was doing him any good. And for what he put Karl through, and nearly everyone and anyone who had to deal with his problem, he figured talking to him wouldn't hurt—or it would, definitely, but a lot less than it would be staying in the arms of the one he wanted to hurt the least.

Silence settled around them; the only thing heard was the occasional clinking of Karl's teaspoon against his ceramic mug and the sizzling pan he stood in front of.

George kept his eyes dead on the dancing tea leaves, not having an appetite for much of anything as he quietly mumbled, "I know it must sound meaningless, but I'm sorry."

Karl chuckled breathlessly. "I've been going through this with you for years now. You don't have to—"

"That doesn't make it okay." George frowned.

Karl lightly rolled his eyes, turning around in his spot to face him. "I don't mind." He grabbed his mug, taking a light sip before saying, "Solely for the fact that you always feel remorseful after. Assures me that you're not a *complete* asshole, you know?"

George shot him a mild look, Karl only smiled in return.

“Although,” Karl barely turned around to stir the simmering vegetables before lightly jutting the head of the spatula to Dream’s sleeping body on the couch. “I’m not the one you should be apologizing to.”

George huffed, dropping his face in his hands. “I know.”

“He’s been through this shit before, you know?” Karl said, a little quieter than before.

George peeked past his spaced fingers to be met with Karl’s back as he continued to stir the steaming food.

He knew Felicity was friends with nearly everyone in the Kingdom. Therefore, for her to have known Violette on a personal level credited Karl’s statement. And it’s not like he couldn’t have guessed. What with the books that Dream’s mother was enamoured with and the fact that George felt like he understood her without having ever met her.

So, yeah, “I know.” He did. “But he doesn’t want to let me go.”

Karl snickered, angling down the dial before fully turning around, arms crossed over his chest. “But it’s not like you *want* him to let go, do you?” His smirk progressed with George’s silence. “I sort of heard...a bit of that conversation between you two. Listen, if you’re serious about him—if you wanna stick around,” He sighed. “You’re gonna have to get better for yourself before you can give *him* that.”

George grunted, sinking in his seat.

“‘Cause I can tell it’s hurting you. Hurting him.”

George didn’t have an argument, not when Karl always seemed to get it right on the dot; *bullseye*—when determining the reasoning behind the disarray thoughts in George’s mind that he couldn’t figure out for himself.

So, moving on for his own sake, George huffed. “You know, you shouldn’t have let him do it.”

Karl frowned. “What—Metanoia?”

George rolled his eyes, muttering to himself. “It has a fucking name—”

“It worked, didn’t it?”

“I could *hear* how much pain he was in, Karl. I’ve never seen him like that before.” George was squeezing the handle of the mug so hard he wondered how it hadn’t shattered in his grip.

“No offence, but,” Karl relented a breath when he caught George’s mild scowl. “If I didn’t allow it to happen, I would’ve lost you for good. And I’ll always put you first. Above anyone else.” George tilted his head to the side, Karl only stared back as if to say his point still stood. “You were going to *die*, George.”

“*Dream* could’ve died. That would’ve been on me.”

“Then don’t let it.” Karl shot him a look. “You got a second chance,” He placed the lid on the pans before walking past him, giving his shoulder a small squeeze. “Don’t fuck it up, handsome.” With that, he walked over to his room. “I’m gonna fix the window you broke now if you don’t mind.

You should take a shower, clean that wound up—I'm sure you can handle it, my little medic." A weak smile tugged at the corner of George's lips, earning him a sly wink from Karl.

As Karl was about to disappear behind the ajar doors, George perked up in his seat. "You've spoken with Quackity yet?" Karl placed a hand on the doorframe before giving him a nod. "Can you...did you tell him?" Karl furrowed his eyebrows, shaking his head; as if the question posed was ridiculous, because—*of course, you wouldn't*. "Thanks."

George felt like he'd hurt enough people today and the last person he needed to add onto that list was Quackity.



Upon returning from his shower, George tapped the bandage that was wrapped around his knuckles, gaze fixed onto them until he noticed a figure in the corner of his eyes. Looking up, his steps halted, stare fixed on the familiar blonde.

"Hey." Dream's smile wavered with his steps.

George's hands met his sides slowly before his feet took him in strides towards Dream, who had his arms ready for his embrace as he held him tight to his chest.

"Sorry." George's arms tautened around his frame, breathing him in. "Dream, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry—"

"It's okay," Dream chuckled lightly, placing a soft kiss against his temple. "I'm just glad you're okay—*god*, am I glad you're okay."

George frowned, pulling away, hands cradling Dream's face. "*Me* okay? What about you?" He lightly tapped Dream's shoulder, causing his brows to furrow in confusion. "You could've fucking died doing that, you know?" Unsuppressible tears welled in his eyes. "You could've fucking—I would have *never* been able to forgive myself if that happened, you get that?" He hit his chest, Dream barely budged. "You're an idiot, you're such an idiot, you're such a fucking—"

Firm hands clutched his face before soft lips crashed onto his; mouth of honey dawdling frantic words from a worried lover who relaxed under the touch of reassurance.

Pulling away slightly, Dream stared back at parted pink lips and blown out doe eyes. "You're the idiot."

George blinked at him. "Excuse me?"

Dream chuckled, shaking his head. "You are *so* blind when it comes to seeing how much I care for you. And that makes you the idiot." George went to say something, but Dream brought his index finger against his lips, re-shutting them. "I knew what could've happened to me, doing that." His eyes nearly fluttered shut at the sound of his name, something sounding ever-so-lovely coming from *him—you're awake, you're here*. "Of course, I knew. But I took that chance and you wanna know why?" He lifted his finger from George's lips to curve that hand against his cheek. "Because you were dying—I couldn't let that happen, George. And that was the only way." Words spoken with fluidity as if it was a no-brainer. "So, yeah. I knew. And I am positive I would still risk *everything* and *anything* for you, Your Majesty."

George huffed, playfully jerking Dream's hands away. "Don't call me that." He forcefully said, adding, "I still think you're an idiot for it."

Dream broke into a grin. “Best idiotic decision I’ve ever made.”

George exhaled deeply, every thought that corroded his heart in spiked chains from the fear that Dream would want to leave after that downward spiral, unshackled. A smile pushed itself into his expression, one he tried to hide from him, but Dream had obviously already caught on.

“You look adorable when you smile, you know that?”

Though it had most definitely progressed into a grin, George rolled his eyes, wiping the stained tears just below his eyelids. “You’re not seriously flirting with me right now, are you?”

Dream giggled, knocking his forehead against his, earning George’s coiling arms around his shoulders. “I’m always flirting with you.”

George simpered, hiding his face in the crook of his neck.

It wasn’t that George needed recognition for *staying*, it’s that hearing that Dream needed him as much as *he* needed Dream pulled him out of that dark pit he convinced himself was his forever home. Because as much as darkness was comfortable because of its familiarity, he found it incomparable to the warmth that lay within the arms currently pulling him in.

“Dream?”

“Yeah?”

George pressed his shut eyes into the curve of his neck. “I promise to never hurt you again.”

A delicate laugh escaped Dream, George swam in the sound. “No need for the ‘again’,” He assured, pressing a kiss against his cheekbone. “No need for any of it.”

A silence passed them, an embrace never broken; two lovers in harmony remain.

“George?”

“Hm.”

“When you were coming down from it all,” Dream tried to pull away to catch his attention, but George locked him in place as he kept their chests pressed. “Why did you tell me you were scared?”

George nestled his head against his shoulder before resting his chin upon it. “Because I felt like I was going to die.”

“But you’re not scared of that.”

“No,” George easily admitted. “But I am scared of losing you.”

Dream arms seemingly ceased around him, George squeezed his eyes shut, proceeding despite being this vulnerable in his arms.

“I thought I was going to die. And you were looking right at me and I was looking at you and I thought—if I die I’m never going to see you again. I’m gonna be leaving you behind.” George sucked back his tears through a sharp breath. “That’s what scared me. Wasn’t scared about how I was acting, just scared that I would leave before making sure you were free.” George’s eyebrows pinched. “I think what I feel for you is out of my control. And it’s scary, but I think...I think I’m okay with that.” George leaned back slightly, “I have...more to say, but if it’s alright, I just...right

now, I just wanna be *here*. With you.”

Dream imperceptibly nodded. “Of course it’s alright.”

A weight lodged itself in George’s throat as he whispered, “Don’t let me go, okay?” He returned his arms around his shoulders, speaking against his neck, “Don’t let me go.”

Dream tightened his arms around his torso, bringing his lips to his temple where he said, “Then let me hold on,” George leaned into his touch, feeling the curve of Dream’s lips as he asked, “Can you do that?”

Earning a mumbled ‘yes’ from George, Dream squeezed his frame.

George sniffled. “I’m gonna stay, Dream.”

And as they pulled away to look at each other, three words were simultaneously spoken, circling them with ease, “You have me.”

For the longest time, George always thought Dream needed him more—he never asked for it, but he clearly needed an escape from the prison his father had him locked in. But as he looked up into kind green eyes and a honeyed smile, George thought he needed Dream just as much.



“Wait, Sapnap is *with* them?”

Karl’s gaze whipped to the both of them; sat comely on the couch, sides pressed into each other as if a mere inch would decrease their lifespan.

Karl had returned to the living room to find George curled up against Dream, who watched the brunet twirl his knife and failing miserably in his attempt to keep it consistent in its motion, deriving fond giggles from Dream.

The phone had rung before he could be the one to interrupt, which he was thankful for because they seemed *good*—and he didn’t want to be the one breaking that.

Especially not after his talk with Dream regarding his feelings for George. Feelings that weren’t *as* prominent as they once were, but enough for Karl to consider that he should maybe simmer down with how touchy he and George naturally are with each other.

Quackity had been asking about George ever since he hadn’t shown for collective breakfast. Admittedly, his first instinct was that George relapsed, but Karl coaxed Quackity, and Niki, out of it. But still unconvinced, as Quackity always was until he’d seen it with his own eyes, was on his way to the atelier. Much to Quackity’s dismay and Niki’s enjoyment for petty drama, Sapnap was tagging along to get to Dream.

And Karl was short for time. Short for time because it didn’t take that long for them to get from the village to here and he still had to speak to two lovesick idiots about the consequences of Metanoia.

“Sapnap is with them, yes and—”

George chuckled lightly. “I can almost *hear* Quackity’s complaints from here—”

“Yeah, he is *not* the happiest guy right now—*but*.” Karl leaned against the mantle of the fireplace. “We need to have ‘the talk’ before they get here.”

“The what?” George quirked an eyebrow, smile fading when his gaze trailed from Karl to Dream who had locked eyes. “Hello...?”

“The consequences of Metanoia.” Dream quietly said.

George immediately looked at Karl, sizing him up before rolling his eyes. “Go on, then.”

Karl clapped his hands. “Great. It’s not much, but it’s also...easier said than done, if you catch my drift.” He said through a nervous chuckle that only dialled down when he was met with two blank expressions; Dream had tried to encourage him with a jerked smile. “I’m gonna start with the fact that you guys are literally joined at the hip now,” Upon saying so, he watched the fond smile they both failed at covering up when realizing that Karl was still in the room. “As much as you guys are sweet, this is *not* that.” He watched their faces dull instantly. “The bond that follows Metanoia is life and death. It can be a good thing—” He quickly added when seeing a bit of fear rise in their eyes. “—for example, George, sometimes you’ll see the world through Dream’s lens; what he feels for the smallest things, things you wouldn’t usually take a second glance at.” George glimpsed up at Dream who shrugged but smiled at him. “*But*...being bonded means that if anything happens to either of you, the other is—well, essentially—fucked.”

George squinted at him with a slow nod. “*Great* start.”

Karl reiterated what he had informed Dream of, earlier that night, which was followed by a small silence; George was seemingly in his own head as Karl and Dream shared a knowing gaze.

He didn’t doubt Dream’s “*whatever it takes*”—*fucking hell*, Karl knew that despite the vendetta Dream recently had towards his father for his own reason, a decent part of him was also doing it in George’s honour. *But it didn’t hurt to test his limit, his loyalty*—and looking at the fierceness in Dream’s eyes when he was defending his point, he knew the love-struck idiot would keep going til’ his voice was shot.

“I think,” George cleared his throat. “I think we can manage that. At least, I think I can—”

“I know we can.” Dream assured him, looking at Karl. “We’ll be fine.”

George lingered his gaze on Dream for a moment, a moment in which Karl fought back his smile when he watched a similar upturn in George’s lips. *A bond that was meant to be forced*, Karl directed his grin at the ground, *but one that was shared prior to Metanoia*.

“As for the temptations...” Karl huffed. “...you’re gonna have to find an alternative. It won’t affect Dream as much, at least not in terms of the Metanoia link. But relapse is going to mess it all up for you, handsome.”

Dream seemed to be in thought, but when Karl glimpsed at George, he found a grin inscribing his lips.

“George?” Karl found himself smiling, for reasons unknownst to him.

George bit his bottom lip, stifling a giggle. “I think that’s...also manageable.”

Dream furrowed his eyebrows until they shot up, a smile jumping into his features before he pressed his lips together; face flushed when they both looked at Karl timidly.

It took a few seconds; seconds Karl *wished* he didn’t take to decipher what George had meant until he felt something crawl up his skin. “Right—”

“Cause before drugs, I used to fu—”

Dream covered his laugh with a cough, pressing his closed fist against his mouth.

“Yes.” Karl clipped. “Got it. Loud and clear.”

The door to the atelier busted open, revealing Quackity, Niki’s head peeking above his shoulder and a familiar face lingering behind the two of them.

Following a chorus of their greetings, Quackity was quick to say, “Cole’s pissed, by the way.” Dropping down beside George after they had all progressed into the tiny house. “Smells good in here.”

Karl sucked himself out of the conversation, quickly recuperating with a curt breath as he looked at Quackity. “Irish stew.” He informed.

“Whoever these Irish people are,” Niki rolled her head back, following behind Quackity before reaching Karl’s side, arms instinctive to wrap themselves around his waist. “They deserve the world for coming up with that—hi, lovely.”

“Petal.” Karl greeted, draping an arm around her shoulders.

Dream and his guard seemed to have entered a brief conversation, one the four of them were not engaged in as Quackity examined George’s bandaged hand.

“What happened?”

George smiled at him. “None of your concern, I believe.”

“Mhm—” Quackity ruffled George’s hair, which immediately halted when he properly took him in. “—holy shit, dude, you’re *glowing*.”

Karl couldn’t even give in his two cents to mention that it was due to the procedure, alleviating everything that repressed the light in George’s features.

The blush in George’s cheeks vexed his words as he mumbled, “Fuck off.”

“Nah, I’m serious. You, on the other hand,” Quackity looked past George and at Dream, who gave him half of his attention. “Look like shit, pal—why are you so pale?”

“Quackity.” George glared at him.

“He lives in a Summer biome, it doesn’t make sense.”

Dream sighed, forcing a smile. “Alex.” Giving him a reluctant, but respectful bow of his head. “Always a pleasure.”

“You must forgive him, Your Highness. He seems to be jealous of your relationship with our beloved George.” Niki winked at Quackity.

“Jealous?” Quackity glimpsed at Dream. “You—I’m—” His words clipped off with his pressed lips; unable to defend himself under the pressure of everyone’s eyes on him, he returned to his natural instinct to be a dickhead, yet never really meaning any genuine harm from it. “What’s he doing here, anyway?”

Fully ignoring the raven-haired guard, Sapnap looked at Karl. “My apologies for coming here

uninvited, Your Highness.”

Karl huffed out a smile before lightly throwing his hands in the air. “The more the merrier, right?” He jutted his chin at Sapnap. “What’d you drink, Nick?”

It hadn’t dawned on him until later that he had offered Sapnap a drink at Neptunalia to apologize for his behaviour, only for Sapnap to rudely scoff in response.

“Sapnap’s fine.” Sapnap smiled kindly, a smile that Karl wasn’t sure matched the face he had properly met in the Salacia courtyard. “And water’s good.”

I don’t mind this change, Karl thought.

Going along with the white flag that had been raised between the mixing realms, Karl squinted at him. “I’ve seen Vulcans drink as if their lives depended on it.”

“Even more than George, which says something.” Quackity slapped George’s knee, earning a jolt followed by a glare.

Karl giggled, returning his gaze to Sapnap. “Rum?”

Dream tilted his head up to look at Sapnap, who stood by his right. “You do like your rum.”

Sapnap lingered on the offer for a moment before redirecting his eyes to Karl. “Is it spiced?”



It took seeing Sapnap for the rage towards his father to resurface.

Not because Sapnap reminded him of his father, at least not in that sense—more so that he reminded him of home, or his place of residence, rather. And because finally having Sapnap at his side, after being around people he wasn’t familiar with, with the vexing information that Sebastian was the reason his mother was no longer with them, Dream felt like he could finally process the news.

That had him bidding goodbyes to George’s friends after they lounged in the atelier for a bit; a momentary solace where conversations were a lot easier amongst a divide between realms, yet a union in their somewhat melodious personalities—except maybe for the banter between Sapnap and Quackity—that, at this rate, Dream was positive was just for show.

The light talk had derived into a discussion of their plan, which hadn’t been retouched since that night in the kitchen. Dream reiterated his promise to The Nether’s coordinates as soon as he returned to Vulcan and when Sapnap offered to help, the others were surprised to have him on their side.

“I still don’t think he should be let in on this.” Quackity had said.

“Well, too fucking bad. I am.” Sapnap countered. *“Run me through it.”*

And they had. And Niki suggested procuring evidence as convincing The Nether to fall back on the battle wouldn’t be as easy as just pleading and begging; they had to show Sebastian’s malintent, which lied within Queen Victoria, who Niki said talked so much she would mindlessly end up confessing.

“I just need to secretly record her talking my ear off and we’re golden.”

“How are you gonna do that? The last time I went in to say ‘hello’, she frisked me before I could enter.” Karl had argued.

“I’ll need someone to record from outside. Any helping hands?”

Quackity had informed George that Cole needed them both; things relating to his kingship, which had expectedly earned complaints from George before he unwillingly abided. Karl would be preoccupied with his mother and Sapnap wasn’t about to offer his help to a near stranger.

“I...could help?” Dream had suggested.

Niki seemed hesitant, at first, but eventually agreed.

Thus setting all of them at the beginning of their plan to the end of Sebastian’s reign.

“Be careful, okay?” George said at the door, stealing glances at Sapnap who lingered behind Dream before *reluctantly* stepping away to give them a moment. “You said to lay low, remember that.”

“Are you...” Dream trailed off, a smile growing on his face, George immediately rolled his eyes. “...worried about me?”

George scoffed. “We’re *‘joined at the hip’* now, remember? If you die, I’m gonna be supposedly miserable—” He broke into a giggle when Dream cupped his face with his hands.

“‘Supposedly’, he says.” Dream grinned down at him before laying a gentle kiss on his lips. “I’ll be very careful, my King.” He hushed against them.

George’s nose scrunched following the term. “What’s your obsession with calling me *your* king, lately?”

Dream briefly looked over his head with a jut of his lip. “Making it clear to myself.” George’s brows knitted in confusion as he mindlessly looked at Dream’s lips. “You’re the only one deserving of that title in this Kingdom.”

George’s eyes flicked up to meet his. Dream’s smile only progressed with his slow realization; that despite the technicality of Sebastian being *his* king, as he was to all of the Vulcans, George was the only one he’d readily call that with all the respect and no reluctance.

“I think Sapnap wants to kill you for making him witness this,” George said before breaking into a grin, which Dream captured in between his own curved lips, a muffled chuckle resting in-between.



A pen cap was clenched in-between Dream’s teeth as he jotted down the coordinates of The Nether from a letter Sebastian had received.

“Dude, dude, dude.” Sapnap ushered from the doorway.

“Go before he sees you.” Dream quickly stated, capping the pen and tossing it back into the pencil holder.

“He’s *right* —”

“Go, Sap—”

“King Sebastian.” Sapnap greeted.

Dream quickly grabbed a sword from the rack beside his father’s desk, mentally emulating the excuse he was going to be forced to offer the moment his father opened his mouth.

Barely acknowledging Sapnap, Sebastian stepped into the doorway. Sapnap backed into the room just as Dream walked into him, sliding the piece of paper holding The Nether’s information into Sapnap’s back pocket while keeping a fixed stare on his father.

“What are you two doing in here?” Sebastian studied his son, sturdy gaze holding nothing favourable.

Dream twirled the handle of the blade, watching its apex in its motion before puncturing it into the ground. “Came to grab this.”

“I don’t recall giving you the permission to.” Sebastian calmly said.

Dream blinked, a sore smile forming his lips. “I crafted it. All rights reserved.”

Sapnap seemingly tensed beside him as the father and son stared each other down, thickening the air in the study.

“Nick, you’re dismissed—”

“Your Majesty, I—”

“You’re deaf?” Sebastian cocked his head to the side, Dream’s jaw clenched as he fought to remain calm. “I *said*, you’re dismissed.”

“Go, Sap. I’m good.” Dream gave him a curt nod.

Sapnap bowed his head at Dream before moving past both men, leaving them to the chaos that was foreshadowed in icy glares and clenched fists.

“So,” Sebastian brushed past his son; a shoulder bump purposefully harsher than usual. “I advise that you do not see that boy again and what, this is...” A creak of his chair under his weight as he settled in, Dream collected his breath; eyes fixed on the apex of the blade as he turned around to face his father’s desk. “...this is you acting out?”

“‘Acting out’.” Dream chuckled to himself, twirling the sword, pricking the ground.

“You’re gonna ruin my flooring.”

“*Oh—and God forbid.*” Dream ridiculed through a bitter laugh.

“This is precisely what a spoiled child would act like. I’m sure you’re aware.”

“And I’m sure that’s pissing you off, isn’t it?”

“Don’t push your luck, I’m being—”

“Patient?” Dream cocked a challenging eyebrow, purposefully dragging the blade across the floor with his steps, the steel scraping a disarray line from where he stood, to the front of his father’s desk. “You’re tolerating me. You’ve *tole-rated* me.”

“Stop whining and pull yourself together.”

“See the difference there?” Dream pointed the end of the sword at him.

There was that hostility and fearlessness that he possessed the day he had entered this office following Sapnap’s near-fatal injuries; the day Dream realized how much easier it was to go off his hinges than to suppress it all.

“What?” Sebastian reluctantly asked, through gritted teeth.

“How...I could’ve told you the same thing, but I didn’t?” Dream continued, the confusion and irritation growing in his father’s expression. “You confused?” He lowered his chin, adding the edge to his tone to intentionally belittle. “Let’s backtrack—the night you came into mom’s study, fucking wasted, embarrassing *me* in front of my *boyfriend*,” He broke into a grin, watching acrimony grow in his father’s face at the undisclosed term between him and George. “*I* pulled you together, didn’t I? Dragged your ass from her study to yours. Tucked you into fucking bed like a *helpless little child*,” His smile rejoiced when he found himself repeating words that were once used against him.

“You better leave right now, Clay—”

“No, I’m sorry I had to *stand* there while you went on about how you were mourning the wife that *you fucking killed*.” Dream’s voice resonated against the walls, sounding out every lit nerve and pressed button from the moment Karl had delivered the news, adding to years of repressed anger towards the very man that stared back: half-stunned, half-unmoved.

A silence settled where Dream regained his breath, the unresponsiveness of his father driving him to madness for something that he was being rightfully accused of—yet wasn’t addressing.

“Say something.” Dream growled.

“That ‘boyfriend’ of yours tell you that?”

Dream let out a terse laugh, one as acrid as the taste in his mouth. “You’re fucking ridiculous—”

“Did he?”

“No.” Dream snapped. “But you’d like to hear that, wouldn’t you? ‘Cause then you could find a way to manipulate me into thinking that he’s the bad guy here. That he wants to tear *us* apart when *you’re* the one doing that—”

“You’ve only just begun to know him. *We* are blood—”

“I don’t care who I am to you.” Dream cut him off, voice deceptively calm. “But you are *nothing* to me.” And he could’ve left it there, could have walked away satisfied with that statement, but a voice like calming waters carried over, “*You said to lay low, remember that*”, causing Dream to clear his throat, swallowing before saying, “I’ll do whatever you want. I’ll fight by your side. I’ll follow every order on the battlefield. But you are *not* taking anyone else from me. You’ve already taken mom, but you are not taking him from me—”

“I don’t have to, Clay.” Sebastian spread his out arms before dropping them onto the armrests of his chair. “You’re doing that yourself.”

Dream furrowed his eyebrows, shoulders slouched with a breath that escaped him.

“You know I’m only looking out for you when telling you to stay away from him, right?”

Dream was snapped out of his confusion, a sour smile etching his lips. “That’s sweet,” He mocked. “You lookin’ out for me, dad?”

“Yes. Because if you keep your distance, you’re protecting your feelings as well as his own.” Dream wavered his glare on him, Sebastian relaxed in his chair with a shrug. “I mean...what do you think is gonna happen to your relationship when the day of the battle comes and he’s got my sword right through him?”

Dream ceased in his spot. “You’re *not* going to kill him.” He spoke through gritted teeth. “You want The Nether’s territory, you can have that. But you are not going to kill him. And you are not taking control of Salacia.”

“Maybe not,” Sebastian jutted his bottom lip with a curt nod. “But you still agreed to base your relationship with him on a lie. And wouldn’t it be *such* a shame if that got out somehow?”

It was then that relief washed over him. *Because you don’t know shit*, Dream lightly smirked at him. *I am one step ahead of you*, he wanted to say as he walked over to his desk, leaning the sword against the edge before placing both palms into the slab of wood. *And you are so oblivious*.

Keeping the promise to ‘lay low’ for his own sake and the others, Dream leaned in slightly as he said, “I know this may be hard to grasp because you’ve never learned to think with your heart, but,” He watched a bitter smile corrode his father’s lips, deriving one of his own; a spitting image he didn’t have a problem with for his upcoming statement, “George likes me too much to let go. Likes how I talk, likes how I taught him to fight, likes the way I *burn* him, the marks I leave on him,” He broke into a malicious grin, “But most of all?” He bit his lip, a chuckle escaping past his lips. “He likes how I give it to him *good* and *hard*.” Sebastian’s smile fell off his lips, replaced with a scowl, “Matter of fact, I fucked him on our kitchen counter, hope that’s alright.” He stared at his son in brief disgust and anger. “You can try to get in-between us, but I’m telling you—you *can’t* take him away from me.”

Turning on his heel, Dream grabbed the handle of the sword before reaching the doorway, watching his grip tighten around the steel. “Answer me one thing?”

Sebastian’s scowl remained from Dream’s earlier statement.

“Why’d you do it?” Dream almost whispered. “Why’d you take her away from me? From Luke?”

Sebastian’s fist clenched where it gripped the end of his armchair. *No answer*.

Dream scoffed, shaking his head. He looked around the room, almost blacking out from surmounting rage before he found himself lifting the sword, launching it directly at the wall behind where Sebastian sat, the apex of the blade wedging itself a few inches above his head.

Sebastian sat stunned in his seat, trying his best not to look scared as he tore his gaze from the fixed sword to look at his son.

Dream remembered the ongoing argument between his parents; how most of their fights started on who deserved Dream’s time. Though it sounded like every child’s dream, it was his nightmare: never having a say and constantly hearing how one parent didn’t want him turning out like the other—no regard for what he wanted.

Defeated, voice shot, Dream stared him down. “I know I never got a say in who I got to spend time with, but if it was up to me?” He shrugged lifelessly. “I’d have chosen mom.”

When he slammed the door shut behind him, Dream realized Sapnap had been listening in because

they had immediately bumped into each other on his way out.

“Dude—”

“Sap, what the fuc—”

“*Dude.*”

“What?”

“...Are you insane?” Sapnap blinked at him.

“*Well...*” Dream glanced at the side. “...might’ve just pretended like I was gonna throw a sword at him, but.”

“This isn’t that ‘laying low’ you morons were talking about in Prince Karl’s place.”

“It is. We just have to move a tad bit quicker now.” He moved past him, headed towards the stairs leading to the chambers. “Which is good.”

“How?” Sapnap asked as he followed him up the stairs.

Dream stopped in his tracks to turn and face him. “Nick, I’ve always dreaded the day he’d die.” He fixed his gaze onto Sapnap, the words on his tongue tasting bittersweet before they glided off with ease, “But now, I’ve never wanted something so bad.”

Chapter End Notes

hiii.

nye happened and i kinda lost track of time, whoops.
we're back to the reg schedule now tho wooo.

treat yourselves good as always. till' next update x (:

Forest Fires

Chapter Summary

Dream is welcomed into George's world after rejecting the one created by his father.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Quackity was walking by his side when they left Karl's atelier; hands pocketed in his puffer jacket, head hung as his eyes followed the steps he took through the village: a ghost town at this time of night.

"Awfully quiet, aren't you?" George finally broke the silence which had dragged on for minutes.

A few more steps were taken until Quackity halted to pull him into a bone-crushing embrace; George's arms loomed around Quackity's torso before he reciprocated, chuckling into his shoulder.

Quackity's voice was muffled by the fabric of his sweater as he said, "I thought you relapsed." George's smile dissipated. "Last time you missed collective breakfast, it got so fucked."

Quackity kept his face tucked into George's shoulder and knowing how tough it was for Quackity to show vulnerability face-to-face, George granted him the hideout.

George tightened his arms around him, turning his head to rest it on Quackity's bicep. "I didn't." He coaxed, lightly clutching the fabric of his puffer jacket. "I'm fine."

"I don't..." Quackity began, grip tautening around George. "...I don't like it when you're gone for too long. Without a word."

A pang struck George's heart as he found himself pulling Quackity in. He knew the reason behind his fear; the very reason that lied behind the abhorrence of meeting his birth parents when Anthea had continuously suggested.

George never going to battle and remaining in his room made it so he never had to witness Quackity's fear of abandonment; always in the security of their palace, yet not necessarily doing safe things.

He remembered the night Quackity told him about their living situation, the very one Anthea had found him in: living under a tarp, faced with the critical state his brother was in and never came back from because his parents had "gone for help" and never returned.

Quackity's entire childhood was spent waiting on people but it seemed he was the only one that had a heart for hope.

George chuckled sadly, squeezing his frame once more before pulling away; Quackity was reluctant, but George succeeded with a bit of force. "Quackmeister," He spoke through a grin when

steadying him by the shoulders. “I always come back.” Quackity clenched his jaw, constricting his gaze on him. “I’m like a roach. Can’t get rid of me.” He tapped his cheek, earning a light shove from Quackity who broke into a breathy laugh.

They progressed through the village with their casual banter returning to assuage the tension that resided; playful shoves and elbow jabs as they stumbled into their steps towards the portal.

“Gonna head to sleep. Training killed me.” Quackity yawned, jutting his chin to the hallway. “Cole’s in Anthea’s office, by the way.”

The heels of his boots echoed through the large hallway on his way to his mother’s office; George slowed down when he got to the ajar door, peeking his head through before lightly widening it open. “Knock-knock.”

Cole’s tired eyes flicked up from the book he was reading at Anthea’s desk. “George—”

“No, I know what you’re going to say and I *know* there are only so many sorries that *I* can say before they become powerless, but I *am*.” George’s words flew with his steps towards the front of the desk where he stood still for a moment, “Sorry.” lingering in his father’s dissipating glare. “I am and I will prove that to you by being there—by...*actually* being there.”

Cole pressed his lips into a thin line before sinking back into his chair with a quiet huff. “Where *were* you?”

“Vulcan.” George quickly answered, realizing that ‘practice’ wasn’t gonna suffice as the sole reason. “And Terra.”

“Your friends said they hadn’t seen you for a full *fifteen* hours, son.”

“I was with Prince Vulcan.”

“Surely you’re not practicing from morning til’ night? And going into the next day?” Cole cocked an eyebrow at him. “Not to mention, you’ve only just come back home now and it is nearing midnight.” When George failed to answer, Cole tipped his head to the side; a smile grew on his lips. “...George?”

“Father—”

“What are you not telling me?” George drew in his bottom lip as he looked elsewhere, but his gaze eventually trod back to his father. “Are you seeing him?”

It was asked calmly, tone wrapped in poise and assurance. So, George nodded—imperceptibly, hesitantly. Cole’s cheeks beamed up with a smile he directed at the desk as George watched him carefully.

“Is that...okay?”

Cole’s gaze whipped back to him, seeming almost offended. “Of course?” He scoffed lightly. “I mean I wish you’d told me earlier, but—”

“I would have. I just...wasn’t really sure what was going on myself. Lots of things happened in between as well, so.” George fidgeted with his rings, watching the dim-lighting catch its gold finish.

A small silence passed them. George wasn’t sure why he was feeling nervous about this whole

situation until it dawned on him that he never really dated anyone. Sure, he's had a decently (to some, concerning) active sex life, one of which his parents were fully aware of, but nothing ever came from that. He wasn't afraid that Cole would reprimand him for seeing Dream—far from it. It was more so that he's never had to deliver this sort of information before.

Cole's, "I'm proud of you." merited George's timid and felled gaze.

George absorbed each word. He'd been praised for other things before, but he knew where this pride came from. And sure enough, when he scrunched his nose to readily dismiss the affection, Cole held up a finger.

"I know you hate hearing it, but...it's just because..." Cole bit the inside of his cheek, studying his son.

George's eyes slightly widened. "Oh my God, *what—*"

"You just look different." Cole lightly threw his hands up before allowing them to fall back onto the desk; sporting a delighted smile. "Good different."

George's features scrunched. "What does that even mean—"

"You're talking a lot more, for starters." Cole motioned to the space he occupied. "And you look... like you've gotten the colour back in your cheeks."

George exhaled a laugh through his nose. "Funny you say that," He cleared his throat, straightening his shoulders. "Quackity said I was...glowing."

Cole broke into an inward chuckle, eyebrows shot up with a cock of his head. "He'd be right." George playfully rolled his eyes. "And would *I* be right to assume that he's good to you, then?" He looked, expectantly; George shifted on his footing. "Prince Clay, I mean."

It was then that this emotionally vexing interaction peaked; not knowing what or how much to say when speaking about how someone he was deeply infatuated with served their purpose in his life—what they did for him.

George's breath staggered as he said, "Wonderful." He nodded slowly. "He's wonderful to me."

Cole smiled to himself, aimlessly shifting a few papers out of his sight before saying, "Let's have him over for an organized dinner tomorrow."

George scoffed out a giggle. "*Why?*"

"I think that's what your mother would've wanted if she knew you were seeing someone."

Though the two of them hadn't spoken much about Anthea since her passing, the statement was said with ease; a bittersweet smile with no residing acrimony.

George chuckled, "You're ridiculous."

"C'mon. It'll be good. Get me out of the rut I've been in." Cole bargained.

George looked around the office briefly before returning his gaze to his father. *You think a lot about what she would want*, he wanted to say, *thus why you spend so much time in here*.

So despite not wanting something as traditional as inviting Dream over for a family dinner, George abided for Cole—and *mum*. "Fine," He sighed out, sending him an impish glare. "I'll ask him."

“Right, then.” Cole drummed his fingers on his desk before giving him a curt nod. “We’ll see you at collective break—”

“Yes, father.” George rolled his eyes as he turned on his heel to head out.

“Sleep well.” Cole chuckled.

George looked over his shoulder, “Don’t stay up too late. You look tired.”

Walking down the hallway after receiving a nod from him, George counted back on the numerous instances in which he caught Cole up at this time when, prior to her passing, he was tucked in bed well before ten in the evening.

A click was heard at the front doors just as one creaked open to reveal a mop of blonde hair. George’s attention perked, as did the corner of his lips when Dream entered the foyer.

“Hey, idiot,” George called through a grin, receiving his attention and barely giving him time to respond as he strode towards Dream, leaping into his embrace. “Perfect timing.” He pulled away slightly, stealing yet another series of words from him with a gentle kiss.

“Should I be worried?” Dream studied his features after his tongue had slicked the taste George left on his mouth. “You’re acting...different.”

George rolled his head back with a grunt. “I’m going to land the most aggressive hit on the next person that says that to me.”

Dream feigned a pout as he reached over his shoulder to grab George’s hand. “With these dainty things?” He laughed when he received George’s glare. “These hands—” He brought it to his lips, pressing a tender kiss onto the delicate skin, desisting the glare and transposing a grin onto George’s countenance as he did so. “—are incapable of malice, my King.”

George’s teeth tugged in his bottom lip at the statement delivered through that honeyed voice. “That’s starting to grow on me, you know?”

Dream nudged the tip of George’s nose with his own. “Good.” He sighed out, hoisting George up, earning a surprised laugh followed by the coiling of his legs around Dream’s waist. “Me too.” He grinned against his lips before re-engaging their kiss.



George was acting different, but not in the same way he had acted in Violette’s study that one night. It wasn’t a concerning amount of energy, it was the right amount. It was shocking, surprising, and it definitely knocked a breath out of Dream, but only because this side of George existed; had ignited through his soul when he was younger—*before* it all got so fucked up for him.

Dream was finally able to get a taste of it. And now he felt he was really screwed. Because he liked George prior to this genuine side of him, but with the addendum of it—his infatuation was pushing him to that “brink of love” Karl was talking about.

Being pulled into George’s room by a guiding hand wrapped delicately around his wrist, Dream followed; eyes stitched to his being with the cloud above his head now vanished, replaced with a single ray of light—faded, but glistening with every growing second.

“You still look rather exhausted, Dream.” George’s cadence matched the one he had used in Violette’s study on the topic of that extensive training—*burnt out, not exhausted*, he recapitulated.

“I...” Dream started, cupping George’s neck and leaning his forehead against his. “...am fine.”

George squinted at him before saying, “We’re unwinding.” tilting his chin up to press a kiss against Dream’s nose, causing it to scrunch in response.

Though Dream wouldn’t give up their carnal interactions for the world, these moments in which George tenderly kissed certain parts of his face had his stomach doing somersaults.

George giggled, aimlessly tracing the bridge of Dream’s nose as he said, “I feel like I’ve said this before, but...” He delicately dragged the pad of that finger to line Dream’s lips. “...you’re really pretty.”

Dream was surely blushing at this point; words interlaced with George’s sweet touch stealing all the replies that could make sense at that moment. George chuckled, brushing his knuckles against the cheek that held his ghosting lips before he walked towards the bookshelf to pick out a novel.

Dream stayed put for a moment. He felt dizzy almost every time that George touched or held him with so much affection—something that felt alien to him unless it came from George. Then, it felt like home.

Home.

They climbed into bed shortly after dressing down to their briefs; George settled himself between his legs, book in hand and back pressed against Dream’s chest who was reclined against the headboard.

Could you be home?

Dream supposed he’s never known what that really meant. For a bit of time, he knew it meant a roof over his head, a family occupying rooms between walls. He began questioning the Vulcan palace being his home when he realized that ‘home’ was supposed to feel comfortable. And though Vulcan resided in a Summer biome, the palace itself felt cold.

And though you’re a Waterborn, Dream readjusted his arms around him as George recited the inked words, you feel warmer than the grounds I was brought upon.



It was under a streak of moonlight casting over their faces when they faced each other in bed that night that George found himself saying, “I feel like I’ll never be able to do half of what you do for me.”

Dream interlaced their fingers from where their hands rested in the crevice of their pillows. “You already do by just being here, George.” His eyes flitted shut at the blissful touch he initiated. “You are the one I always needed.”

George’s breath interlaced with his in a warmth that encompassed him as he whispered, “Always needed?”

Dream imperceptibly nodded. “Sometimes I feel like I’ve known you.”

George’s heart strung at the words he’d heard a piece of himself speak in that study where Dream played the piano while he read Violette’s books. *Sometimes I feel like I met you yesterday*, George recalled the nervous tics, the twirling of the pocketknife, the furrowed brows, *sometimes I feel like I’ve known you my whole life*, a kind gaze, a honeyed voice—a heart of gold.

“Like I’ve known that someone—” Dream swallowed, George sighed contentedly. “—that someone like you could exist—actually, I prayed that someone like you could exist.”

“Dream—”

“Needed to believe it.” Dream shut his eyes the second a tear slipped down his face. “Needed to believe that someone as...*good*—and as kind as you lived in my world. And you do, you’re right ___”

“I’m here.” George gently squeezed his hand before brushing his lips up to his forehead.

“—here,” Dream buried the remaining syllables into the curve of George’s neck. “George...you’re ___”

“Right here, Dream.” George broke into a smile, carding his fingers through his hair before enclosing every inch of space between them. “M’right here.” He almost chuckled, tears welling in his eyes for the umpteenth time, derived by the exact same reason—*you*.

George has felt euphoria from drugs before, but this—whatever lied within the insuppressible urge of breaking into tears at *such* tenderness that only they could offer each other—*this was unrivalled*.



It started that morning when he woke in the warmth of Dream’s embrace; their shirts ditched to the ground, meeting their pants, allowing their skins to brush softly through sleepy stirs.

He started to feel again and some things felt comfortable.

Like the sturdiness of Dream’s chest against his back, the caresses of his forearms at his ribs, the small exhale on the nape of his neck or in the nest of his hair. His hair—the soft, sunlit strands in the space between his fingers when he turned around to brush them as gently as possible so as to not wake him. And the feather-light tracing of Dream’s sleeping features, how imperfectly perfect his skin felt against his own skin.

“Why are you awake?” Dream mumbled against his finger when George’s tracing reached his lips.

George’s initial shock diluted into a small chuckle. “Why aren’t you, early bird?”

Dream huffed, fighting to open his eyes. *His eyes look beautiful like this*, George thought as the sun rays peek past wilted lashes and squinted eyelids, bringing out the faded green with a twinge of blue, *you’re beautiful*.

Dream smiled lazily. “Were you watching me sleep?”

George has never felt more hungry in the morning than he did now, hearing Dream’s voice enrobed in sleep—scratchy and dazed.

George brushed his thumb over his cheekbone, watching Dream’s eyes fall shut once more. “Can’t blame me, can you?”

Dream’s gaze met his, slightly more awake now. George stared back into a pool of emerald, soft and tender as Dream himself. Slowly leaning his forehead against his, George gently brushed his cheek down against the tip of Dream’s nose, lips cracking into an upswing when Dream nestled it into his cheekbone.

Deriving a giggle from George, Dream swiftly grabbed his wrists before pinning them above his head, capturing George's lips as he moved to hover over him. George sighed into the kiss, spreading his legs so Dream could settle between them—a contended exhale through his nose when his groin brushed against the sides of Dream's torso.

Their lips brushed slowly, docile avidity driving each stroke. Dream's hands returned to where George liked them best on him: his waist clutched within his possessive grasp—one that had George a tad bit light-headed with every contraction.

And everything went sound. Until it didn't.

He started to feel again and some things felt uncomfortable.

There was this relentless tweeting that kept swirling through his space and as much as he could easily lose himself in the feel of Dream, he *couldn't* shake this sound off for the life of him.

"D'you..." George spoke against his moving lips, Dream pulled away with him. "...hear that?"

"What?"

"It's, like..." George looked to the side, following the sound with his gaze. "...like, chirping?"

"Chirp—I...the birds?"

George looked at him with shot-up brows. "Yes —what the fuck?"

Dream stifled a laugh as he watched him, confused and half-concerned. "That's just the sound of the morning, George. Birds chirp and—"

"Well, can it shut the fuck up?" George propped himself up on his elbows, pursuing Dream's lips with his own as he mumbled against them, "Breaking my concentration."

Dream playfully drew away to tease. "'Cause you need to be concentrated for this?"

George chuckled through a hum, eyelids heavy with adoration as his eyes fixed the source of his allure. "Not much." He barely vocalized before capturing Dream's lips with his own.

It became easy, for a bit. Ignoring the sound of the birds. Until the universe decided to interject one more time.

He didn't want to ruin it for Dream, but he must've shown discomfort in his stir against him because Dream broke the kiss.

"What?"

George huffed lightly, glancing down at his sheets that felt *rough* against his skin. "The sheets *feel* weird."

"The sheets?" Dream surveyed him. "What—"

"Sorry. Fuck. Don't worry about it. C'mere," He interlocked his fingers behind Dream's neck, pulling him flush against his chest as he fell back into the mattress; wrapping his legs around his hips and purposefully grinding Dream down against him, until his lips slowed in their course and he pulled away again. "Wait—"

"What is it now—"

“Have you always heard the birds?”

Dream dwelled on the question. “Uh,” He nodded with a jutted lip. “Yeah—”

“Here or Vulcan?”

“Here and Vulcan.” Dream giggled. “Why? What’s going on with you?”

George propped himself up on his elbows again, Dream leaned back to lock their gaze. “Remember Karl said I’d be feeling your feelings or some shit? Like...seeing the world through your lens?” Dream nodded. “Do you like the sound of birds, Dream?”

Dream chuckled with a small shrug. “Yeah. I do. Is that...isn’t that a normal thing—”

“What other things do you like?”

Dream scoffed. “I like lots of things—”

George playfully rolled his eyes. “The little things, Dream.”

Dream puffed out a curt breath before lightly crashing down on George, resting his chin on his chest. “I like...” He broke into a grin, shielding his eyes in the dip of George’s sternum; George giggled, running his fingers through sunny strands, urging Dream to look at him. “...I like tea—mint tea. I like when I end up browning my toast *just* right. I like the 1PM sun,” He brought a finger to George’s ribs, lining each of them as he continued quietly, “I like seeing the flying sparks from when I smelt things—when I’m crafting weapons. I like the 10 PM breeze when I’m training outside, just—yeah.”

George had already told him how he’d unmistakably listen to him speak all day, so he listened—endearment engulfing him in flames that scorched his soul.

“It doesn’t sound like chirping, the birds. They sing—beautifully.” Dream’s lips grazed George’s chest. “I hope that you don’t only get to *see* the world through my eyes, George, but that you get to *feel* it, too.” He glimpsed up at him, his stubble brushing against his sternum. “I want you to have the little things because they make the days worth it, you know? Makes them liveable, not just...”

“...Existable?” George attempted with a lop-sided smile, earning a nod from him.

Maybe it was the way it shimmered his skin or his undying golden personality, but George concluded that Dream *was* the sun. In every form except physical, he shone; brightening George’s space and kissing him in sun rays.

George gingerly caressed his fingers through his hair. “I do already have a little thing, I think.”

“Yeah?” Dream asked through a lazy grin.

George nodded. “Like the way you smell.”

Dream’s smile progressed as he asked, “How do I smell?”

Reviving, refreshing, rejuvenating. “I don’t know. How does one describe a smell?”

For having read misanthropes and a plethora of novels, George wasn’t fooling anyone by pretending he didn’t have an extensive description—*but it was too early to tell you all this.*

“Pine and sweet mint.”

George's fingers stopped in their course through blonde strands. "What?"

"That's how you smell." Dream easily said.

George, then, realized—for something that came as instinctive as that answer did, you must've had it locked down for a while. "Solid scent." He grinned.

"Hm." Dream swiftly pushed himself up so his lips brushed against George's as he said, "You have no idea."



For as quiet as the way to Eurus was, the silence between Dream and Niki wasn't awkward. She had her arm linked with his; something Dream had offered out of common courtesy and code of conduct. Being fairly close in proximity, Dream would catch her in her thoughts—he wondered what worries lied within that creased forehead and knitted clean-cut brows.

As they marched up the staircase leading from the courtyard of Eurus to its palace, Niki finally untangled their arms. "Alright, she's currently hosting collective breakfast, so now's the perfect time for you to hideout—"

"Hideout—"

"Yes." Niki curtly nodded. "There is a built-in cupboard, lofty enough. It's to the right of her desk, next to an obscenely large plant—can't miss it—uh, keep your head down? Make sure no one *sees* you go into her office?" Dream concurred. "Okay," She breathed out shakily, glancing down the hall where the dining room resided a few doors down. "Ready?" She mindlessly asked.

Dream studied her carefully with an impish smirk. "Are you?"

She shot a playful glare his way, brushing past him. "Oh, and," She beckoned, spinning on her heel to glance at him. "Thank you for doing this, Your Highness."

A few Eurans caught him on his way to Victoria's office. Some women he'd definitely spoken with in the past—maybe did more than *just* speak with—greeted him as he walked the halls; all he could manage was a respective bow. *Keep your head down*, he mentally revised.

Victoria's office was unmissable from the outskirts; her grand portrait hung up, loud and proud above her desk chair. He fought the urge to roll his eyes as he progressed into the room; if there's one thing she and his father had in common it was the pride of their status and power.

Upon hearing clicking heels and faint voices approach, Dream rushed to the cupboard, struggling to get it open until he pushed on it, popping it loose— *whatever happened to regular doorknobs in this modern world?*

"Make it quick, will you? I'd like to *end* breakfast before taking them out on the field for pre-collective training." Victoria huffed, annoyance dripping in her tone.

From where Dream was hidden, he couldn't see *shit*, but he'd known Niki a fair bit to be able to dichotomize their voices.

"I just wanted to run some things by you, for Verenalia."

"Nearly forgotten about that—go on, then."

Victoria spoke as if every minute spent conversing with her daughter was shaving a day off her lifespan, Dream recognized the tone all too well.

“It’s about the guest list,” Niki began, Dream tried to figure out what her plan was—when he would have to press record for the confession he wasn’t sure would come up on the basis of this topic. “About who to invite.”

“It’s a festival. Therefore, the whole Kingdom, Niki.” Dream could almost see Victoria roll her cunning grey eyes. “You’re not the brightest bulb in the box, are you, love?”

Dream’s eyebrows lightly shot up. He knew Victoria was a bit of a bitch, from his own mother’s perspective, but to see it in action—directed at her own daughter—that was hard to digest.

“Maybe not.” Niki didn’t seem fazed, continuing confidently. “But what am I supposed to think when I’m not really sure where you stand with Salacia?”

Dream’s hand twitched in his pocket, the pad of his forefinger brushing against the tape-recorder as he slowly retrieved it—sure not to make too much noise as he brought it as close as he could to the door.

“I’m sorry?” Footsteps, either furthering from Niki or threateningly advancing towards her.

“I overheard the phone call you had with King Sebastian.” Dream leaned in closer. “How you conceived a plan of some sort. What’s your issue with them? Actually, what’s your issue with George? ‘What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him’?”

Dream had heard all of this before when George’s friends and himself lingered in the kitchen of the Salacia palace following their mildly concocted plan to destroy Sebastian’s own. Niki hadn’t actually heard much from that phone call, but her mother didn’t know that. Dream smiled to himself when he realized that she could simply use what Karl found out to her advantage without actually blowing their cover of wanting to stay low so Sebastian wouldn’t get suspicious.

“Niki, don’t get involved in things that you cannot emotionally handle—”

“*Why* are you trying to kill George?”

“Because Sebastian needs to take over Salacia and make the realm his. He needs his powers so that we can make space for The Nether.”

“What are you *getting* out of this—”

“Once we defeat their leader on the battlefield, either before or after killing your good friend, *George*,” Victoria spoke with such reluctance and apathy that Dream felt as if he was experiencing *deja-vu*. “The Nether joins forces with us, they can no longer raise hell against us. They’re too powerful as an enemy. However, when locked in the realm of our Kingdom, they’ll, essentially, be putty in our hands.”

“You guys aren’t conducting a fair battle.”

“Who said it was going to be?”

“Isn’t that what The Nether has been informed of?”

“It doesn’t matter what The Nether has been told. The less they know the better. We’re just monopolizing them, Niki. Their leader is some old, shrivelled-up bastard. Sebastian will do a much

better job.”

That was easy. Dream glanced down at the blinking red dot on the recorder.

“Salacia is still very welcomed to Verenalia. In fact, I expect you to not speak of this to King George—assuming that you *haven’t* already—”

Oh, fuck. Dream’s gaze drew to the door. He immediately switched off the tape recorder.

“Of course not. I know you’d have my head if I did. Because that’s all you care about isn’t it? Gaining power? Never mind that you’ll be *killing* my *best* friend in the process of attaining it.”

“Oh, Jesus Christ, sweetheart. Save me the waterworks, will you?”

She was crying?

“Alright, you know what? Do all the crying you need, I’m gonna head out.” Heels sounded like they were nearing Dream and he held his breath. “Just need to get my—”

“You’re the reason why daddy left.”

Maybe Niki had panicked and thought to say the most triggering thing to stop her from opening the cupboard, but a breath was ripped from all three of them.

Time stilled.

Dream swallowed quietly, stare fixed on where he could see Victoria blocking the light that seeped through the cracks of the cupboard.

“I beg your pardon?” The fluctuation of her voice indicated that she had momentarily turned to look at her daughter again.

Fear rose within Dream: for himself and for Niki.

“You’re controlling. Manipulative. And he had to leave because you—”

“Because *what*—”

“Because you’re a *whore*.”

Dream’s hand clasped over his mouth as soundlessly as he could manage. Suppressing an unwarranted laugh as shock resided in his widened eyes. *Holy fuck.*

“You will *not* speak to me that way—”

“You are *killing* my best friend—whose mother looked after me when you were too busy chasing a stranger’s load with wine—”

“Niki—”

“You *know* what you did. And Anthea cleaned up *your* mess when she didn’t owe you a *single* thing, so you are *not* killing the *only* person whose family has treated me with genuine love. You are not taking that away from me.”

This rage that fuelled Niki wasn’t something that she could conceal. Because she wasn’t close enough with Dream for her to *know* that he was in this room with them, hearing all of this, yet

deciding to continue in expressing what sounded like years of repressed anger towards Victoria—in however she had wronged Niki in her childhood.

This rage stemmed from the fact that Niki *knew* Victoria partook in the killing of Queen Anthea, yet she couldn't voice that without blowing their cover.

Victoria's footsteps left Dream's realm when they returned to where Niki stood. "You listen here, okay?" She began slowly, quietly—*all too well*, Dream thought as he matched the tone to that of his father's. "You got lucky because somehow Anthea found something in you that she loved. Unfortunately for you, I am not her. Because *every* time that I look at you, all I can see is a fucking burden." Whatever surge of adrenaline Dream received from Niki's rebuttals died down as Victoria continued, "And did you not ever stop to think that your *daddy* would've stayed if he, too, thought you were deserving of the love and attention that *sweet* Anthea gave you?" Dream held his breath, fists clenched around the tape recorder. "No. Exactly."

Dream felt nauseous digesting her words and if he felt that way he couldn't even imagine how *Niki* felt.

Victoria's footsteps returned to him and the door clicked open, Dream sucked in a sharp breath, pushing back into the cupboard as much as he could before the daylight peered into his darkness. The coathangers displaying Victoria's coats slid away from where Dream hid—*one by one*—until she stopped right before he could've been revealed.

The door was shut again. No words were spoken or exchanged for a minute. Dream thought he could maybe finally breathe.

"That dress doesn't do your waist any favours, by the way," Victoria called out before her voice disappeared down the halls.

Dream pulled onto the little handle at the corner, squinting at the bright light before his gaze immediately found Niki; fervently wiping her tears as she forced a smile that pained the both of them.

"Not too...warm in there?" Niki giggled, Dream elbowed the door shut, keeping his eyes on her. "I suppose that's not too much of a problem for you, though, is it?" She tried to joke, Dream walked towards her. "Did the recording—" Her words halted when Dream had to stop himself mid-lift of his arms.

"Can I...hug you?" Dream quietly asked.

Niki's lips flapped shut before she broke into a smile, followed by a tear that slipped from her eye as she nodded. Dream wasted no time in wrapping his arms around her.

Dream had covered a long time ago that he wasn't good at comforting others. At least, not in the physical sense. But he remembered that embrace in his mother's study; the first time George held him— *really* held him.

A muted "*I get it*" was transpired with Dream's tightening grip around her as she nestled her head into his chest, her body shaking uncontrollably in his comforting hold.



"What are you guys doing out here?" Karl giggled when he stepped out of his atelier.

George dropped his hand from where they resided over the water.

“This motherfucker just lifted water and turned it into a block of ice.” Quackity tugged onto George’s shoulder to move him out of the way; showcasing the source of his surprise.

“*Handsome...*” Karl cooed.

George rolled his eyes. “For fuck’s sake—”

“This is huge for you—”

“I hate this already. Please stop talking.”

“No, c’mere—”

“Get *away* from me.” George broke into a fit of giggles when Karl sped up towards him, arms spread open and awaiting a crushing embrace. “*Stop*, Karl.”

In the meantime that George and Karl were running around the same tree to catch the other, Quackity remained fascinated at the block of ice, poking at it with marvelled eyes. Quackity had done something similar to this before, maybe even a lot bigger, but what warmed George’s heart was the pride that warmed *Quackity’s* heart at his improvement.

“Get off—” Karl tripped George before straddling him to the ground; the both of them entering a laughing fit as they wrestled in the dirt. “You are *so* annoying—these are *your* trousers that you’re dirtying, by the way—”

“*What?*” Karl shouted, his actions ceased as he gawked at George.

“Hello, boys—alright, what the fuck?” Niki exasperatingly said when she caught Karl and George.

George’s eyes immediately flew to Dream’s own and something within him, and Karl, it seemed, had the two of them scrambling to stand up to their feet—keeping a fair distance between them.

“Hey.” George walked over to Dream whose eyes narrowed the space Karl occupied. “Dream,” He beckoned after lightly grabbing his forearm.

It wasn’t until Niki addressed Karl and Quackity again before joining them that Dream glimpsed down at George.

If I didn’t know any better, George smirked at him, slightly getting up on his tip-toes to press a delicate kiss against his cheek, *I’d think you were jealous*.

When settled in the warmth of Karl’s atelier, they concocted a letter to send to The Nether—a brief explanation; their request to call off battle, accompanied by the tape recording that would reveal Sebastian’s malintent.

Quackity demanded to hear the tape back and when it had cut off abruptly, they all turned to Niki as if she was the culprit. George kept his eyes on Dream, knowingly.

“*What happened there?*” Quackity had asked Niki.

“*She was talking her ear off about Verenelia. Decided we could spare The Nether that part.*” Dream spoke for her.

George followed his gaze which locked with Niki’s from across the coffee table. Karl and Quackity didn’t seem to have picked up on it, but George did, and he most definitely saw the bow of Dream’s head when Niki mouthed him a ‘thank you’.

They made their way back to Salacia in the evening for the dinner that Cole had planned.

“Prince Clay,” Cole greeted at the door. “Glad you’ve decided to attend.”

“Wouldn’t miss it, sir. I’m honoured, really.”

That interaction chased a laugh out of Quackity, which he terribly covered up with a cough. He earned an elbow in his chest from George when his inability to keep quiet only worsened George’s own failed attempts at stifling his giggles.

Felicity’s footsteps neared them and she wore a bright smile when greeting Dream; though George wasn’t worried about them mistreating him, the kindness was admired in the appreciative smiles he sent Felicity’s and Cole’s way.

Δ

Dream wasn’t sure how to respond when George had first mentioned a dinner being planned in his—or more so—their honour. It felt *official*. And they hadn’t even really decided what they were.

But then Dream would have George holding his hand the entirety of the dinner, mindlessly leaning into him when waiting on dessert; his head tucked in the curve of Dream’s neck whilst he fought to keep his cool as he conversed with Cole. *And no one questioned anything, not a mere second glance their way.* It had Dream wondering if their title, his and George, went without saying.

Towards the end of dinner, Cole, George and the three others had entered a conversation that unintentionally excluded himself and Felicity. No parties read into it too much, so when Dream excused himself for the bathroom, in an attempt to actually scurry off to the kitchen for a breather, no one questioned it.

Dream tried to fight off the blush that rosed his cheeks following George’s brainless kiss—the both of them staring at each other wide-eyed when they realized where they were.

Entering the kitchen, Dream nearly jumped out of his skin from spotting Felicity seated at the stool of the kitchen island.

“Hey, stranger.” She greeted with a grin, pushing up her glasses so they pulled her hair back. “Not having fun at the party?”

Dream tried to lie and proceed to the bathroom, but with her kind regards and the warm energy always surrounding her, he surrendered with a huff. “It’s incredibly kind—what Cole has done, but it was getting a little...”

“Stuffy?” Felicity attempted with the squint of her eyes.

Dream broke into a nervous grin with a nod, leaning his side into the counter. “What about yourself, Your Majesty?”

“Oh, call me Felicity. You’ve earned that.” Felicity waved him off. “And the same reason as you, actually.”

“Ah.” Dream clicked his tongue. “Is now a good time to say that I actually left ‘cause the rice was sort of terrible—”

“Jesus—Cole *never* listens. It was rock fucking hard, wasn’t it?”

Dream winced. “Didn’t have the heart to tell him. I’d let it break off each tooth, one by one if I had to.”

“Ugh,” Felicity face-palmed with a giggle. “That’s the Salacian charm. They get away with too much.” She shook her head, not letting a silence pass before she asked, “What did you, um,” She leaned into the counter. “Think of the mash?”

Dream furrowed his eyebrows because—*he hadn’t mentioned it, but the dish tasted strikingly familiar to his mother’s recipe*. “Um. Was good, yeah.”

Felicity hummed, gaze veering to the marble countertop ahead. “Familiar, even?”

Dream narrowed his gaze on her and froze in his spot when she looked up at him. “You...” He breathlessly chuckled. “...she taught you her recipe.”

From the conversation he shared with Karl the night of George’s downward spiral from Mephemeta, it had jogged a few memories within him—Felicity’s face popping up next to his mom’s in situations that seemed hazily remembered over time.

“Did I honour it?” Though it was meant to be lighthearted, Felicity’s voice had cracked down to a whisper.

Dream’s lips quivered into a half frown and he nodded. Because the taste *had* knocked a breath out of him as to how spot-on it’d been. “Right on the bullseye.” He strenuously spoke.

“No one did it quite like her, though, huh?” Dream bit down on his lip as he felt his heart churn at the sight of a lost lover. “I’ll tell you the real reason I left if you tell me yours?”

“It was the mash. You got me.” He lightly threw his hands up, emanating a giggle from her. “You?”

Felicity’s tongue slicked her lips. “Whenever I’d catch a glimpse of you and George...I’d see so much of myself and Violette.”

Dream feared that was the truth—for the sake of his soul, his eyes fluttered shut so he wouldn’t have to witness the tears that began to gloss over her eyes.

Keeping his stare fixed on the ground, Dream said, “I’m sorry that we never spoke when you used to visit. I was too young to understand that you guys were seeing each other.”

Felicity chuckled. “That is understandable, Your Highness—”

“Please.” Dream gently urged. “Call me ‘Dream’.”

And just as she had understood where he was coming from, Felicity said, “She gave you that name, didn’t she?” She broke into a grin. “*Her* Dream, she’d say.” Dream’s cheekbones rose with his smile. “She wanted us to meet, but, you know.”

Sebastian. Dream nodded. “Yeah.” He hung his head, aimlessly drawing on the island with his finger. “How did you...do it? Handle my mom?”

Felicity’s silence brought his eyes to her. “You’re asking me how to handle George?”

Dream huffed, glancing at the side. “I know how to handle him, I think. I just...fear that one day I

won't be enough for h—to stop him from falling back into it.”

“Oh, lovebug.” Dream nearly ceased at the nickname—he realized how she and Karl did that, so early in a yet to be formed bond; Terrans were great conversationalists and maybe this was part of their charm, but Dream felt like they were the only ones who get away with it and not make things awkward. “I’ve known George since he couldn’t even talk yet and the way he was looking at you tonight when you weren’t looking?” Dream’s heart skipped over its regular pace in anticipation. “Dream, I have never seen that look on his face before,” Dream’s features hardened with his clenched jaw. “He looks at you like he’s seeing *all* of you,” A shaky breath punched past Dream’s lips. “And it is a *brehtaking* sight from the sidelines.” She grinned at him, blue eyes glossed over with pride. “I am in no position to speak on his behalf for something like this...but I personally think that he’s got *so* much love for you that he has no idea how to contain it. *He* might be the one who feels as if he may one day not be enough for *you*.”

Dark brown eyes returned to him under that moonlight. “I feel like I’ll never be able to do half of what you do for me.”

“Just like Violette, George sees and understands people too much for his own good. He’s selective, but when he chooses you, he loves with *everything* that he has. And if he knows that ‘falling’ will result in hurting you, he will never do it—hurting others hurts him too much.” Felicity shook her head, definitive with her answers like she didn’t care if George somehow overheard; like he would agree if anything. “He’s a fragile boy at heart. And the reason neither Cole nor I have doubted you for a second is that we know love in George when we see it.” Dream’s eyebrows pinched together, fist clenched in the safety of his pocket. “We saw it to some degree with Alex, Niki, Karl—and with you, I mean...” She shrugged. “...it’s that but intensified.”

A heavy silence sat on them, not in the way that made it awkward but one pensive enough that Felicity knew to allow him time to absorb.

“Is that...how you felt?” Dream quietly asked. “About my mom?”

Felicity broke into a grin. “I’m not like George in this situation, Dream. I’m like you.” Dream’s breath hitched with her statement that cemented itself through his head with her regard. “We have both fallen for the purest people this Kingdom has ever known. It’s a privilege, you know? And the biggest compliment.”

“Because of the responsibility that comes with being their partner?”

“Because of the responsibility that they trusted us enough to have over them. *Only* us.”

Dream flickered his gaze to the ground. “But...your son, Karl...he’s George’s anchor. Wouldn’t that make him—”

“He trusts Karl to keep him alive, trusts him with his life.” Felicity simply stated. “He trusts *you* with your own life. He trusts you to *stay*.”

“*Don’t let me go.*” Dream recalled, remembered how that wasn’t what made that moment monumental but rather his agreement to *allow* Dream to hold on. *Trust to stay—because you want me to, because you need me to.*

Dream let out a heavy exhale, earning a beaming smile from Felicity.

Felicity tilted her head to the side. “Weight off your shoulders, lovebug?”

Dream chuckled nervously before nodding. “Thanks.”

“For what?” And she looked genuinely confused, for a reason Dream didn’t understand.

“For...helping me.” Dream furrowed his eyebrows.

Felicity’s brows mirrored his own but with the addendum of a wavering smile. “Helping you? Dream, we just had a—” He blinked at her, awaiting her response. “—that bastard really fucked you guys up.” She muttered under her breath before standing up from her stool.

“What?” Dream followed her actions but before he could ask anything else, he was enveloped into her embrace; he stilled because it felt an awful lot like the one he’d receive from George and the one he offered Niki—and *it came full circle because it resided within her*—Felicity pulled away, a warm smile etched on her face, eyes squinted with the growing ardency—as *good-natured as Terra herself, as calm and serene*.

“I see what your mother meant.” Felicity smiled up at him. “It starts with the everlasting look in your eyes.” Dream’s confusion continued to grow, despite the utmost relief he’d receive from the embrace he never managed to return out of shock. “You really are a dream.”

“I wish I had met you when she wanted me to.” Dream mumbled, glancing down at the space between them before looking at her through a felled gaze. “Thank you, Felicity.”

“You don’t have—”

“For loving my mom when my dad couldn’t.”

For the first time since having properly spoken with her, what he had said girded her—whirling a breath from pink-tinted lips.

Felicity sniffled. “Loving her was the easiest thing I’ve ever had to do.”

The door to the kitchen swung open and just as they moved aside to glimpse at the intruder, Karl halted in his steps to take them in.

“Seriously, dude?” Karl looked him up and down. “First you’re gonna take George, now my mother?” Dream stifled a laugh only because of their conversation in the atelier.

“*Karl*.” Felicity chimed in.

“Relax, woman.” Karl playfully rolled his eyes. “Dream and I go way back.”

“I might steal him from you, actually.” Felicity drummed her fingers on the island. “And he’s taller, could reach higher shelves for me.”

“Literally, if you’re short, just grow? I don’t see why you gotta steal my friends for a problem that is solely yours and no one else’s?”

“Keep that mouth running and—”

“What the hell is going on here?” George mumbled with Quackity and Niki in tow, Cole filing in shortly after.

“Okay, fellas,” Karl spoke from over Felicity’s head where his chin rested as he hugged her from behind. “We’re gonna head home, but wardrobe prep tomorrow?”

“Verenalia,” Cole lightly gasped. “Felicity, would you do me the honours—”

Quackity retched. “—This is so fucking disgusting—”

“You don’t even have to ask, good sir. I’m wearing red, so wear—”

“You guys are so lame, there are colours that aren’t just standard...”

Karl’s voice blurred into the background, as did the scene, the moment he felt George’s arm interlock with his. Dream glanced down at him with a warm smile, one which was returned with just as much fondness.

“You okay?” George’s chin brushed against his bicep as he spoke each syllable carefully.

Dream nodded. “Overwhelmed, I guess. In a good way,” He briefly glazed over the room; a warmth-filled space with banter between people that had genuine love and care for each other in a place as domestic as a kitchen.

George squeezed his arm before pressing a kiss onto the fabric of his jacket. “This is my life every day.” The statement was said with no trace of malice, nor excitement—not exactly—but rather contentment: *bliss*. “It could be yours, too.” Dream caught doe-eyes. “Do you want my life to be yours?” Hushed and spoken in their own little solace, each word caressing Dream with tenderness.

“So long as you’ll have mine, George.” Dream whispered the last words into the nest of his hair where he laid a gentle kiss.

George didn’t say anything, Dream had come to understand that that wasn’t alarming from him—his words, if not spoken, showcased itself in his actions with just as much meaning: he interlocked his fingers with Dream’s own before coveting as much of their interlaced hands as he could with his free hand.

You squeeze my hand in between yours and I understand that we share this, Dream grinned against his hair, George nestled further into him—*that we will share this life, hand in hand*.



They retrieved back to George’s room after lingering in the kitchen with the others until everyone called it a night.

“So,” George spun on his heel when the door shut behind Dream. “I’ve got a few things to ask you.”

Dream turned around to face him, squinting slightly at the dubious smile that danced on George’s lips. “I’m scare—should I be scared?” He playfully returned his hand to the doorknob, chasing a giggle out of George.

Dream’s list of little things was a lot more extensive than he had expressed to George, earlier. In fact, eighty percent of Dream’s *little things* revolved around George: the laughs; quiet, soundless—but especially the big, surprised one that resonated in Dream’s head through a beautiful melody. It was the feeling of his fingernails grazing against his scalp. It was the feeling of his hands; how soft his skin felt against his. It was his lashes when he would have no choice but to look through them as his height vexed him whenever they stood close. It was all of it and more. And for being little things, it swallowed Dream whole.

“What happened with you and Niki?”

“What do you mean?”

“The recording,” George began with a smirk as he walked towards him. “Karl and Quackity seemed to have blanked, but you were in charge of the tape recorder—so why exactly did you cut it after Victoria was clearly getting angry?”

“I told you,” Dream cleared his throat. “Vere—”

“She’s my best friend, Dream.” George simply stated. “And I’d say I know *you* pretty well. Well enough to know that whatever happened for you to have abruptly ended the tape must’ve been something Victoria said to her.” Dream watched the steps he took, keeping his wavering gaze on George. “How harsh was she?”

Dream drew in a breath before complying because admittedly, they were best friends. “Niki called her out for what she did to her? Something about her mother being ‘sexually active’...” A *whore*, as Niki put it. “...and *your* mother coming in to rescue Niki.”

George paused on the statement for a moment before nodding slowly. “Oh.”

“What?” Dream soundlessly said. “You can’t just say that—tell me what happened. What did Queen Victoria do?”

George pursed his lips to the side, contemplating. “Mum took Niki in whenever Victoria would leave her on the streets of the village, sometimes in the pub, while she went and sucked some guy off.” It was the way in which he didn’t bat an eyelid when saying something so shocking that Dream knew they had already accepted this part of Niki’s life, no matter how foul and vile.

“*Fuck.*” Dream muttered under his breath, disgust laced in his cadence.

“Next question,” George began, enclosing the space between them.

Dream shook his head at him. “You don’t waste a second, do you?”

“Nope.” George popped the ‘p’ before his lips cracked into a grin. “Why are you jealous of Karl?”

Dream froze as George’s arms snaked around his waist. “George—”

“He told you.” George nearly whispered, Dream could only stare back. “That he had feelings for me.”

So, you did know. Dream swallowed. “I feel bad, George. But then again, the bond you two share, how long you’ve known each other, how comfortable you are with one another—he’s your fucking anchor for fuck’s sake—”

“Dream?” George gleamed up at him. “You’re an idiot.” Dream’s offence riddled his expression, corroding a smile onto George’s lips. “For thinking what you’re thinking—” When Dream opened his mouth to say something that would only further his blind jealousy, George quickly added, “—I love Karl in the same way that I love Quackity and Niki. But I’ve only got eyes for *you*, okay?” Dream hardly nodded, causing George to lightly tap his temple as he said, “Get that screwed and locked into that pretty head of yours, yeah?”

Dream hadn’t realized how much he’d been smiling until he felt an ache in his cheek, one that vanished the moment George pressed up against him to place a chaste kiss on the ball of his cheekbone.

“Now,” George leaned his palms onto his chest. “I am going to get changed and then we are going to get in bed. How does that sound?”

“Good. Go.” Dream lightly shoved him away, deriving another light laugh from George, bringing him pride and filling his heart to the brim.

Dream chuckled because all of his worries, no matter how poisonous they felt in the moment, were exonerated with a simple look from lovely brown eyes and soothing words from supple apricot lips.

Minutes had passed when Dream felt like he’d warmed the piano seat enough to have played a full composition. There was a small fear within him; maybe it was the small fear that remained with George’s moment in his mother’s study: high highs turning into low lows real fast.

“George?” Dream stood up from the stool, hesitant to move forward. “You planning a whole outfit in there?” He attempted a joke; maybe it was to coax himself.

Dream walked towards the door, taking in a deep breath. *You’re overthinking this.* He placed a palm on the birch, leaning his ear in. *Silence.*

“George, can I come in?”

“Yes.”

Dream pushed the door open, a surge of adrenaline from the uncertainty that lied within him towards the end of the minutes that felt a little *too* long for George to just be changing.

George’s shirt had been ditched, the waistband of his slacks loose at his waist like he’d been interrupted by something mid-change. His back was to him; bare, rigid, stiff.

Dream stepped in. “What’s—” George slowly turned around.

Dream realized, then, that he hadn’t been overthinking it—the assumption he wished to be false resting in George’s shaky hands.

Chapter End Notes

these are taking a lot longer to pump out, that's my bad pfft. things are gonna start to pick up in the next chapter cos i love angst too much.

thank you for the nice, as always. take care of yourselves of course. until the next one
x (:

Out in the Open

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



There was a moment of silence where George kept his eyes fixed on his hands and Dream kept his gaze fixed on George.

“George.” Dream beckoned, approaching him with care—audibly rather than physically, remaining fixed in his spot.

“I’m okay.” George hoarsely replied.

Dream wasn’t convinced. George’s hands quavered; he seemed unstable, and he couldn’t take his eyes off his temptation; the bag of crushed crystals sitting in his palm.

George glanced at him when Dream remained unspoken. “I didn’t take any.”

Dream swallowed. “Then why do you have it?”

George’s eyebrows slowly knitted—he was calm, not defensive, which assured Dream of some things and worsened his worries for others. “It was leftover. From that night.”

The night both of them had witnessed a side to the other which they hadn’t anticipated.

“Dream, I didn’t have any,” George imploringly looked at him; a twinge of betrayal with the slight exasperation in his tone. “I swear.”

“Still doesn’t answer my question, George.” It hurt Dream to have to parry him, especially when he was served with George’s self-deprecating regard. “Why didn’t you throw it out?”

“I wasn’t ready to let go.”

Dream forced himself to dismiss the frailty in George’s tone as he asked, “Are you ready to let go now?”

They were speaking in hushed tones, both of them too scared to tip the other off.

George soundlessly sighed. “I don’t want to.”

Dream’s breath came down with George’s reply. What *felt* like a minute of silence sheathed them.

“Can you, um,” George cleared his throat, Dream looked at him through a grounded gaze—you’re *still unsteady, almost trembling in your spot*. “Um...” He flicked his gaze to the ground. “...can you hold my hand?”

Dream’s brows knitted because it wasn’t *like* him to ask something as futile as that—if anything, George would deliberately grab his hand. But with glossy brown eyes staring back at him, accompanied by trembling lips, Dream was quick to tend his hand, interlacing his fingers with George’s own.

George wasted no time in walking them out of the room, his free hand clutching the plastic pouch.

Dream watched him attentively until they reached the sink in George's bathroom.

George sucked in a sharp breath, unintentionally squeezing Dream's hand as he lifted the pouch over the sink. Everything was being done so fast until George opened the pouch, tipping it ever-so-slightly over the drain. His actions ceased when the powder rested dangerously close to the edge of the packet. Dream watched George squeeze his eyes shut, wincing—*reluctant to let go but knowing deep down that he should*.

Dream brushed the pad of his thumb over his knuckles, causing George's eyes to flutter open to fix the packet.

In a swift movement, followed by George's breathless, "Fuck's sake." The contents of the packet were emptied into the drain—Dream's hand had never been squeezed so hard than at the moment George continued to dump the powder through a blind, quelled rage.

The tap's handle was flipped up quicker than Dream, or George could register, washing away his temptations past redemption.

George's glare burned holes into the drain; his jaw clenched, curt breaths exhaled into the palm clasped over his mouth as he failed to calm himself—*but attempted*. Trying—*he was trying*.

After flipping down the tap handle, Dream asked, "Are you okay?"

George's eyes flapped shut as he spoke through his fingers. "I wanna break something."

Dream chuckled to himself when he caught his side profile; like a pouting child—a *grumpy manchild*—and Dream was forever endeared.

Not undermining the courage it took George to follow through with that, Dream kept their hands interlocked as he passed it over George's head before wrapping his arms around him, pulling George's back into his chest.

Speaking into the nest of his hair as he glimpsed at their reflection, Dream hushed, "You're exceptional." He kissed the top of George's head, watching him falter under the touch, though the piece of him that still craved escapism stared at the drain where the last bit of it was exonerated.

Delicate fingers slowly wrapped themselves around his forearm, a kiss was returned in between the space of George's fingers. "Will you read me to sleep?" He softly asked. "Your voice is the only thing...that's..."

"Yeah." Dream caught his tender gaze in their reflection. "Of course."



George's head was heavy on his chest when Dream finished reciting the third Baudelaire poem.

Passing feather-light fingers through dark hair, Dream leaned down to lay a soft kiss on George's forehead before carefully pulling away.

He returned to the room after his shower, with a towel slung over his shoulders to amass the dripping dewdrops from his hair; being in Salacia made it a bit tough to remain in just a shirt and his briefs, but he'd be returned in the surprising warmth George's arms offered soon enough. *George*, who was fast asleep, turned on his stomach, angel-face buried in the soft linen—*peaceful and no longer hurting*.

Walking back to the nightstand to grab the book and return it to its rightful place, Dream found himself glancing at all the other novels; hand-written notes peeking past the edges of some.

Curiosity had him reaching for a familiar cover. *Kafka*, he recognized, mindlessly flipping through the pages until a rather thick stack of pages stopped its fluid rhythm. Fumbling to keep the loose pages tucked in, his eyes caught the highlighted series of Kafka's writing:

November 2. This morning, for the first time in a long time, the joy again of imagining a knife twisted in my heart.

Dream veered his gaze to George's note, scribbles that he could barely make out, but after a few minutes read:

This morning, every morning prior to it and the series of mornings looming over me, this joy pulls me to life only so I can leave it in agony. I want to feel the torment of the puncture, twisting itself, revelling in every bit of muscle and tissue. I want to feel the pain, slow and languishing. I want to feel one last time before I leave. I want to feel. I want to feel and feel until I feel nothing – until the grim reaper and I disappear hand in hand. I want to disappear, I want to disappear, I want to disappear...

The last four words went on for three more notes, progressively more unreadable. Dream winced slightly as he moved to the next part of the book that held a thick stack of notes; all in link with a somehow more morbid highlighted bit of Kafka's writing.

"Dream?"

Dream's head whipped in the direction of the voice he'd been imaging through the inked words.

Mindlessly hiding the book behind his back after fluidly tucking the loose notes back in, Dream replied, "Yeah?"

"What you doing?" George slurred through sleepiness.

"Putting your book back."

"Come to bed?"

Dream nodded, returning the book with hesitance. Climbing in, George's arms were already reaching out for him; Dream settled on his back and allowed George to rest most of his weight onto him before he was out like a light once again.

If there was one way to understand George, it was through the books he read; all these misanthropes and morbid authors depicting his unwillingness to exist—the lack of purpose he ironically *found* in living.

The look on George's face as he emptied the last bit of powder that could give him the disappearance he so deeply yearned, however, was refreshing—no matter the pain felt by the both of them to witness how it vanished down the drain—*he was trying*. Dream brushed his fingers through his hair, aimlessly fixing the placement of some strands—*you're trying to stay*.



George wasn't dealing with Metanoia too well. Mainly, the fact that everything was sending him over the edge: incessant tears and the inability to keep everything compressed as he once had.

He missed the cold.

George used to be solely wrapped in ice, making it easy to feel *nothing*. Feeling nothing was his gateway to merely existing, as he had aspired to do until what he craved most in this world would sweetly sweep him up and lay him to serene rest inside a homely coffin for eternity.

He missed the cold, but he knew he had to let go.

And he should—should kick the million bad habits he had accumulated over years of not wanting to care. Because now, as he laid with a pretty blonde prince who was willing to *stay* and who was counting on *him* to stay, George *wanted* to care.

“You win some, you lose some,” George recalled his mother saying. And so though he missed the cold, he would miss Dream’s warmth way more—making his final choice to ditch the bad habits for a heart of gold a no-brainer.

George briefly remembered falling asleep *on* him, but when he woke that morning, Dream’s chest was weighty on his. He didn’t mind it. In fact, he floated in the feeling. George can’t imagine ever growing tired of this: waking up next to him, their limbs tangled.

His heart grew at the sight of Dream, causing him to wrap his arms around Dream’s middle, dipping his nose into the nest of his hair, breathing Dream in. *How have I made you mine, in such a short time?*

How are you willing to stay with no need for convincing? George carded his fingers through his hair, ghosting a kiss over the loose strands—*I love you.*

The thought alone took him by surprise, ceasing his actions—Dream woke up, then, stirring in his arms before glancing up at him through a heavy-lidded gaze.

“Morning.”

His voice hadn’t helped the thoughts in George’s head as he stared back, unknowingly, with slightly wide eyes.

“You okay?” Dream seemed alarmed when faced with the small fear in George’s expression.

“Wh—what? Yeah. Yes. I’m—hi—I mean *I’m* not high, not like, high—just.” George stumbled, stammered, deriving chuckles from Dream. “Good morning.” He huffed out through self-defeat.

“Hey.” Dream hoarsely replied through a lazy grin.

Fuck. George tried to push the returning thought, but it sweetly tantalized him the longer his gaze held Dream’s smile—*I love you.*

“Fuck, didn’t mean to suffocate you—” Dream tried to lift himself up from where he laid, but George kept his arms fixed around him.

“Don’t...you dare move.” George shot him a playful glare.

A giggle bubbled past Dream’s lips, one that tickled George’s core as he found himself echoing the sound.

“Are you...” Dream propped himself up on his elbows, gently nursing George’s face. “...still thinking about it?”

George interlocked his fingers behind Dream's neck, tipping his chin up slightly, "No."

Dream narrowed his eyes on him, a tug at the corner of his lips as he said, "You're lying."

George squinted at him. "*Maybe.*" He broke into a grin, emanating a smile from Dream, though he could tell his mind wasn't yet at ease. "I'm always gonna be thinking about it, Dream. It's just about how much control I have over those thoughts."

Dream went quiet for a moment. Where his fingers lightly brushed through George's hair, they ceased, his gaze diverted to the empty spot on the bed that he previously occupied. "How much control do you have right now?"

George wasn't sure what feeling surged through his heart following the tone Dream had used: *innocent and docile.*

George brushed the side of his thumb down Dream's neck. "A fair amount." *Because you're here,* He wanted to add, but instead said, "So, don't worry. Don't let it tarnish your gold."

Dream laughed lightly. "My gold?"

George grinned. "Mhm." He kissed him slowly, whispering, "My golden boy." against his lips.

Dream pressed his forehead against George's with a sigh. "You're such a headfuck, you know that?"

George giggled against his lips, the sound muffled in the walls of their mouths as Dream tenderly rejoiced their lips.

"One second you're making me feel sane, the next you're driving me crazy." Dream grazed their lips. "Good crazy—fuck, does it feel so good," He nearly grunted the last syllables, George hummed into their kiss when feeling the tips of Dream's fingers brush down his side.

"I wanna replace the thoughts in your head." Dream practically slurred against George's lips. "Gonna make it quiet for you, too."

"Yeah?" George brainlessly hushed against his mouth, capturing Dream's bottom lip between his teeth; lidded brown eyes following the pull before it flopped back to its rightful place: Dream's skin bitten and plush—*I am so hungry for you,* George watched Dream's tongue swipe over the bite. "How do you plan on doing that?"

"Turn around?"

George's gaze immediately flickered up from Dream's fleshy skin to his coy regard. His lips parted to reply but he could only muster a grin that seemed to have reflected onto Dream's countenance.

George lingered in his stare for a moment before slowly turning around in the space of Dream's arms to lie on his stomach; propped up on his elbows with a bit-down smile as Dream lightly hovered over him.

Dream brushed his lips against the top of George's ear, causing his eyes to flutter shut. "Is this okay?" Earning a small nod from George, Dream grazed his ribs with his fingers before hooking them at the waistband of his briefs. "Up." A mutter followed by a kiss that had George readily submitting to the command as he lifted his hips from the mattress, his ass flush against Dream's crotch.

Maybe it was the addendum of how *delectable* Dream sounded this morning, but the mere feel of Dream's erection against him—despite there being intruding fabric between their skin—had nearly derived a moan from him.

“Can I take these off?” Dream's question took the form of a tickling breath in the curve of George's neck, having George lightly kink into the touch as his cheeks grew hot.

Desperate to be touched by the very hand at his waist and the one digging into his pillow for support, George shakily whispered, “Yes, please.”

Dream grazed his teeth over George's shoulder blade, the bone more defined as George's elbows grew weak with having to hold himself up. Following a gracious bite replaced by a gentle kiss, George dropped his weight into the engulfing mattress.

He was getting really fucking warm under his touch and George wondered how that could be. He had gotten turned on before; before he started abusing drugs *whilst* having sex, but he never felt *overheated* from it.

Lingering kisses trailed from the nape of his neck down his spine, Dream's hovering weight gradually descending with himself until he felt Dream's forearms caging his thighs.

Dream's palms were flat against his back, resting inches above his ass where George felt the ends of Dream's fringe brush before a wet kiss was pressed onto his asscheek.

George bit down on his bottom lip, cheeks hot as he suppressed a giggle at the tickling touch. Dream clutched the kissed cheek into the space of his palm, his free hand drawing down slightly as George felt his thumb resting dangerously close to his sensitive skin.

Kneading the fat against his palms, Dream pressed his lips at the tip of George's hole, causing George to jerk at the salacious contact—one he'd felt before but not as effective as it happened in their realm.

“Relax, George.” Dream's lips brushed against his keening skin with every spoken syllable, thumb drawing circles over his cheek when he desisted his moulding. “You okay?”

George fought to speak, words restraining themselves through a moan as he nodded, in hopes that Dream would catch it—and he had because his lips returned, further down, accompanied by the lapping of his tongue.

George gripped his pillow so tight his knuckles had gone white; squirming in the sheets as Dream's tongue continued in its carnal motion. Dream progressed unforgettingly, the both of them carousing for different reasons all dialling down to a single sentiment: *pleasure*.

Euphoria seemed to be a common occurrence between the two of them, George had found since even before the Metanoia bond was placed onto them.

“Tighter, Dream.” George revelled, involuntarily pressing himself against Dream's slicking tongue.

Dream obeyed, tightening his grip on his ass, kneading his cheek till it filled his palms; unknowingly squeezing when he reeled a drawled out moan from George.

His hair stuck to his forehead from how many times he found himself nestling his face further into his pillow. George sighed as he felt Dream's tongue desirously pushing past his walls, causing him to grind back against the motion in search of more.

“Please don’t stop.” George strenuously spoke.

Dream’s lips came off him with a pucker as he breathlessly said, “Yes, my King.”

A scoff jerked past George’s open-mouthed smirk as he debauched in the title, spoken in a ludicrous scenario, stealing all senses from him.

Dream continued in his attempts to please; to untangle all previous temptations from George’s mind, to replace them with *these* ones. And George found himself shamelessly rutting and squirming in his sheets—sheets which he tugged and gripped for the warmth that began to pressurize itself in the pit of his stomach.

Pushing and pushing, George’s entire body felt feverishly hot, brain fuzzy to the point of passing out—it felt like. *Rutting and rutting*, George’s grasp loosened around the sheets and his pillow in sync with Dream’s grip on his ass where he could already imagine the imprints of his scalding touch. George’s breath hitched, trembled; spews of zeal tainting his sheets where he came undone.



“Oh, and, we also need to touch up on your elemental training—attempt it in my realm, maybe even pick up on your accuracy through the bow sight again, and—” George stole the remaining words from Dream’s mouth, stopping him dead in the middle of the Salacia foyer.

George grinned up at him when pulling away and Dream’s heart flourished as he looked into slitted eyelids and a beaming smile. “Noted, my golden prince.”

His heart flared at the reiteration of ‘gold’—*his* golden boy, as George had said. Dream’s mind was still living in the arches of George’s back following every stroke of his tongue. The soft noises emitting George at the squeeze of his hand—the fragments cemented themselves in Dream’s mind eternally.

George giggled, wrapping his arms around Dream’s shoulders and leaning into him to lay a gentle kiss on his prominent cheeks from his insuppressible and bashful grin. “I’ll see you soon, yeah?”

George’s hand-written words tucked along with Kafka’s remained in Dream’s head while he was getting changed for training.

And when he was sitting at collective breakfast, with Sapnap to his right talking about something he couldn’t entirely focus on, Dream thought about how the man who’d written those words about disappearing was the same man that kissed him that morning. And how they didn’t seem to go hand in hand, but somehow lived within George—that duplicity worked its way around every thought Dream had until breakfast was over and he was met with pretty brown eyes, fair skin, and his refined body beautifully sculpted in his training attire.

Dream spoke through a grin as he walked down the Vulcan hallway to meet George, “Did I ever tell you how good you look in your training gear?” wrapping his arms around his thin waist before lifting George from the ground, giving the both of them a half-spin as he did so.

“No, but,” George steadied himself with his grip on Dream’s shoulders. “I sort of gathered that from the stammering and blushing on your account. During earlier training sessions.” He teased, causing Dream to place him back on the ground, embarrassment bringing his hands to shield his face. “If it’s any—” George laughed, wrapping his fingers around Dream’s wrists to reveal his flushed expression. “—if it’s any consolation, my mind was going crazy every time you took that

stupid jacket off.”

Dream brought his hand to George’s waist and nudged him into his chest. “Oh, yeah?”

George’s fingers looped themselves around the straps of Dream’s harness, his eyes flicking down to Dream’s mouth. “Mhm.”

Dream hummed, leaning down and skimming their lips. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

George’s mouth curved against Dream’s before he flicked the tip of his tongue against Dream’s bottom lip, whispering, “Please do.” and closing the space between them.

Dream squeezed his waist, jutting his thigh in between George’s legs, drawing a sigh into the space of their lethargic kiss.

It seemed as if the both of them momentarily forgot their surroundings, George slipping his hands up so they cupped Dream’s neck, feeding the fire behind their strokes.

A cough broke them from their daze—Dream was the first to pull away, George seemingly still chasing his temptation as Dream locked eyes with Sebastian.

“Dad.”

George turned around with hesitance, one hand still curved at the nape of Dream’s neck while veering his stare to Sebastian.

There was a beat of silence where tension pumped itself in the air around them until George fully desisted his hold on Dream to walk towards Sebastian with a tended hand.

“King Sebastian, forgive us.”

Dream felt like he momentarily blacked out in the time that his father and George exchanged a proper greeting as if nothing leading up to this point had happened—as if George didn’t know that he was shaking hands with the person that was planning his murder.

“It seems that this will be a common occurrence,” Sebastian forced a smile, gaze fixated on George as Dream shot daggers his father’s way. “Me walking in on the two of you.”

George laughed.

He fucking laughs, Dream was so beyond confused he wasn’t even sure how to react in this situation—so he didn’t; remaining put behind George, hands crossed behind his back where he squeezed the life of out his fingers to assure this was real.

“God, I hope not.” George scratched the nape of his neck. “My sincerest apologies.”

Sebastian paused on his countenance, a wavering smile barely contained as he stole a glance at Dream who fixed him, just as confused. “No apologies needed. Last time was *entirely* my fault. *I’m* sorry if any—”

“It’s as you said.” George cut him off with a small bow of his head. “No apologies needed. Forgivable mistakes, if you ask me.”

“Well, I am glad.” Sebastian returned the respective bow, mildly glimpsing at his son.

“King Sebastian, I’ve been meaning to speak to you, regarding the battle against The Nether,”

Dream dragged a heavy breath—*what the fuck are you doing, George?*

“I wanna say...I’m incredibly grateful. Honestly.”

What. Dream blinked at the back of George’s head, disbelief swallowing him whole. Sebastian looked over at Dream and he immediately pulled himself together because *whatever it is that George is doing, it’s disingenuous*—it was a plan fully concocted by himself, on the spot, in the mere seconds that lived in between their interrupted kiss and now.

“You’re taking the reins on this and it’s a lot and...your warriors, the way you and your son have been training them, as well as my realm and the others—it’s incredible.”

Sebastian cleared his throat, straightening his shoulders—*of course, you look relieved*, “Oh, King George, I am only doing what Anthea rightfully deserved. To be avenged.”

Dream noticed the shift in the back of George’s muscles.

“And I’m appreciative of that. I know I was a bit of a prick when you first brought up the battle, but I wasn’t in the right headspace. And having no experience in fighting, I respect all the help you’ve given. I’ve actually wanted to tell you this, for a while, but Dre—Clay told me it was unnecessary.” He chuckled, shaking his head. “I think he was trying to be humble, but.”

Sebastian looked at his son before saying, “Yes, well. I suppose he’s right to hold you back on that because it is my utmost pleasure, King George, to rid the monster responsible for your mother’s death.” George hummed, hanging his head with a small nod. “So, no gratitude needed—and anyway, it isn’t *all* me, is it?” George glimpsed up at him. “You and Clay have been practicing, so I’ve heard. Assuming that we’ve pushed the battle forward, training must be exhausting.”

And he has the audacity to accompany that fact with a dumb fucking laugh, Dream measured his breaths.

“Yes.” George breathed out with a smile. “It’s been extensive, but...progressive?” George looked over his shoulder at Dream, sent him a wink and turned back around. “Your son’s doing a very good job.”

Dream couldn’t allow the smile that begged to corrode his lips because Sebastian looked him up and down. “Right,” He directed his gaze back to George. “While I have you here, I wanted to apologize for the altercation between one of my guards and your own. I suppose I panicked when I heard that there was a breach in my office.”

“Oh. Yes, it’s fine—Qua—Alex has always been very nosy. He told me he wanted to get his hands on the swords that you keep in your office. I have no idea how he knows that but—”

“Ah, well, if he so desperately wants one of them, they were all crafted by my...by Clay, here, so.” Sebastian motioned to the space Dream occupied. “I’m sure he wouldn’t mind crafting one for...I am terrible with names.”

You don’t give a shit, more like, Dream rolled his eyes.

George forced a smile. “Alex.”

“Alex, yes.”

“I’ll be sure to bother your son for that later on.” Dream almost smiled at George’s reiteration of ‘your son’ when it was clear it pained Sebastian to hear it. “As for the altercation, let’s...consider

it another forgivable mistake?”

“Gladly.” Sebastian released a deep breath. “Very well. You boys keep up with the training and I will continue to do the best that I can to assure the victory of this battle.” He gave George the most disingenuous smile Dream has ever seen, one that had him fighting the urge to hurl.

“Thank you.” George stepped aside following a firm handshake with Sebastian.

Dream kept his eyes on George, at a complete loss for words for the interaction he convinced himself was a pure hallucination.

“Oh, and,” Sebastian turned on his heel, eyeing Dream before glancing at George, “Congratulations, to you both. God knows this Kingdom could use some love, right?”

Once Sebastian was completely out of sight, Dream heard a huff leave George, causing him to turn around to face him with the shock he was finally able to display.

“Your father’s full of shit.” George scoffed. “‘*God knows this Kingdom could use some love*’—piss off.” He rolled his eyes.

Dream blinked at George before flailing his hands at him, words unable to carry over his thoughts.

“What?” George asked through a lop-sided smile.

“What the *fuck* was that?” Dream sputtered.

“Damage control.” George shrugged.

Dream gawked at him. “How did you *not* want to kill him just now? All that shit he was saying about avenging your mother? The amount of praise he allowed himself to take from you—”

“Dream, Dream,” George chuckled, wrapping two hands around Dream’s arms. “Chill—*yes*, it killed me doing that, but...” His gaze fluctuated across Dream’s face. “...someone told me I was exceptional, so...m’trying to honour that.” Another laugh bubbled past his lips as Dream stared back, worried this time. “I’m *fine*. I just wanted to make sure he wasn’t suspecting anything, yeah? You’ve all been doing something to help this plan against him and I feel like I haven’t done much.”

“George, you shouldn’t *have* to do anything—”

“I *wanted* to,” George assured. “I want this to go as flawlessly as possible because with all due respect, Dream, there is *nothing* more that I’d like than to have your father *brutally* murdered.”

Dream swallowed the words that nourished his soul. “That is possibly one of the hottest things you’ve ever said to me.”

George broke into a laugh, one that sat with the previous sustenance to his core. “C’mon,” He interlocked his fingers with Dream’s own. “Better my fighting so I can have my fair share of damage when we finally take him over.”



Training with George had been sparse given everything that had happened in the last few days, but Dream noticed the progress.

Sometimes, when George wouldn’t think twice before launching his arrow or forming waves with his bare hands, Dream would stand back and wonder how much more powerful he would be if he

had started training when he was younger.

Because George was a quick learner, it seemed. Or maybe it was the Metanoia link they shared, or maybe it was George letting go of the drugs, *or maybe*—George was finally letting himself *feel*.

Whatever it was, Dream was in awe—especially when George went from Water to Ice Manipulation with no guidance from Dream.

Throughout the weeks of practicing with George, Dream noticed he didn't really like to be praised. And in not wanting to break George's concentration, Dream figured he would just admire from afar. Which went a little like George looking over his shoulder with the biggest grin after succeeding and Dream being unable to stop the mirrored expression on his face; his cheekbones high with pride.

A part of Dream was almost scared when George would miraculously create big waves and sleek ice over the stream of water. He'd wonder how much George was really capable of: *how much damage are you gonna end up causing to my father on that battlefield?*



“Your Highness!”

A sea of warriors filed out of the Vulcan training field; some on their own, some in groups—Niki was by herself, Karl and Quackity were lagging behind.

“Princess Niki,” Dream slotted his sword at the back of his harness when approaching her. “What’s...going on?” He looked over the training field. “Where’s everyone going?”

“Oh, um,” Niki glanced over her shoulder while slipping her dagger into her thigh holster. “Sebastian called it off for today.” Earning Dream’s confusion, she offered a shrug. “Yeah, I don’t know, but that gives us more time to prep for Verenelia, so.”

Dream raised an eyebrow at her statement because—*we? Since when was he involved in the process?*

Niki caught the perplexion, giggling to herself as she half-turned to await on Karl and Quackity. “Now that you’re with George, you’re gonna get sucked into our plans. Sorry to break it to you.”

With George. Dream huffed before breaking into a smile, “Right, I guess...that’s fine.” his gaze veering to the approaching pair.

“Fucking great. If it isn’t my arch-nemesis.” Quackity eyed him and Dream didn’t even have the time to rebuttal when Karl chimed in.

“Hey, loverboy.” Karl greeted with a smile, causing Dream to push down one of his own at the nickname. “Are you coming to the wardrobe prep?”

Dream had no idea *what* a wardrobe prep actually entailed until he was ushered into George’s room, Karl and Niki pulling out two full racks of hung-up outfits from George’s closet—Dream wondered when or how those had gotten there.

“I’m contemplating the lacey look, George.” Quackity must’ve said something entirely shocking because everyone except for Dream, understandably, looked at him with wide eyes. “Oh, here we fucking go—”

George's, "Actually? Can I pick?" was interlaced with Karl's, "Alex, look at me, this isn't you." and interjected with Niki's, "As long as it's pink."

George sat up where he knelt behind Dream; his thighs caging Dream in at the edge of the bed, arms slung over his broad shoulders. "You're wearing a *pink* dress?" George asked, his breath tickling Dream's scalp.

Niki frowned. "Have we not collectively agreed to wear pink?"

Karl rolled his eyes. "Petal, no one is wearing *pink* to Verenalia, get a grip—"

"It's a sex festival, not a preteen's birthday party." Quackity chuckled.

"*Oh.*" Niki cocked a challenging eyebrow with her hands on her hips. "A *sex* festival?"

The room stilled and Dream felt George's muffled laugh into his shoulder—*whatever Quackity said was gonna cause him trouble.*

"Yeah, wasn't Venus into that shit? That's your ruling planet, no? Am I..." Quackity glanced around the room, seemingly losing Karl's and George's defences as he continued to dig his grave; having his last source sitting anxiously in the space of George's arms, Quackity looked at Dream. "...now's the time to get on my good side, dog boy."

Dream caught George's middle finger to Quackity in the corner of his eye, whirling a soft chuckle out of him. "Dog boy is an interesting one."

"Yeah, figured since you're George's *bitch* now—"

Maybe his impulsive need to directly retaliate when attacked—verbally or physically—was what had him rising from his seat. And were it not for George pulling him back down, Dream would've had Quackity slammed against the wall behind him.

"Okay," Karl giggled, yanking a few shirts from beside Dream and George before nodding his head to the doorway. "Let's figure out this shirt situation. I need to analyze your closet."

Quackity's stare which locked with George's own could only depict the image of a man silently begging for help as Karl practically dragged him out of George's room.

"I'm gonna try this dress on," Niki tossed a sleek, black dress over her shoulder. "Since we are no longer wearing *pink*." She shot a glare George's way.

"Ey, don't look at me. Karl's in char—*Niki*," George laughed when she turned away from him, making way towards the closet. "Pink's an overkill, you have to admit!" He shouted after her, receiving a nonchalant hand before she was out of sight.

"You guys take this pretty seriously." Dream smirked as he looked over his shoulder.

George shuffled from behind him before lying down on his back, his head next to Dream's thigh as he looked up at him. "Karl has an eye for aesthetics. Wants us all to complement each other's outfits—colour coordination or some shit—fuck if I know. We do it for him, mostly."

"Yeah? You do a lot of things for Karl?" Dream impulsively said.

George turned his head so he was looking directly up at him with a smirk. "Here I was thinking you'd gotten over this jealousy thing."

Dream grunted, falling back onto the bed, allowing the mattress to momentarily engulf him. He felt George's hands situate themselves at his sides, digging into the bed for support.

"I told you not to worry—"

"Have you two slept together before?" Dream opened his eyes to catch the offending expression George wore.

"You're an idiot if you think that—"

"Kissed?" Dream quirked an eyebrow at him.

George's lips flapped shut almost as simultaneously as Dream's eyes had. "We've only made out a few times, but that's—"

"Only?" Dream sat up on his elbows.

"It was, like, *two years* ago, Dream." George rolled his eyes.

"So you haven't since?" Dream narrowed his eyes on him.

George opened his mouth to readily answer until he looked to the side—*as if he wasn't sure*.

"Oh my God." Dream fell back into the mattress.

"We were high—we always are when we—" George ceased the next series of words when he caught Dream's glare. "It never meant anything, Dream. Just what happens when you put drugs and testosterone in a room, ye know?" He suppressed a laugh, causing a reluctant one from Dream, only increasing his own as he leaned in to hide his face in the curve of Dream's neck. "You have nothing to worry about."

Dream veered his head from him, urging George to look down at him from where he hovered over.

George shot him a look. "Dream."

Dream rolled his eyes to the side.

George giggled, placing a kiss on his cheek. "Look at me." He mumbled against the warm skin, Dream kept his eyes on the wall beside them. "Dream," He cupped his jaw, emanating a suppressed chuckle from Dream. "I like *you*." George softly peered into his eyes, pressing a kiss on the tip of his nose before attempting to reach his lips, which caused Dream to turn his head. "*Kiss* me." George laughed, gently jutting his chin, having Dream surrender to the touch as he welcomed the taste he'd been undeniably craving through this whole act.

Whatever was about to progress was interrupted when Niki's footsteps returned. They'd pull away just in time, but it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what the sight of their flushed cheeks and plumped lips meant.

Niki's eyes widened. "I have more dresses to try on, actually—"

"No, stop." George choked out a laugh as both he and Dream sat up to face her. "What happened to the dress?"

"I don't like how it fits." Niki huffed, eyes veering to size George up in silence.

"Um." George followed her gaze. "See something you like, love?"

Niki retched. “Don’t *ever* say that again—I was thinking how it’d probably look good on you, which is honestly sort of aggravating how you can do that,” She tossed the fabric to George’s lap. “But you should try it on. I wanna see.”

Dream chuckled as he glanced at George. “Yeah, try it on, George.” He teased, elbowing his side.

George shot him a glare. “Shut up,” He returned his gaze to Niki. “There’s no way I’m wearing a dress to a festival, Niki. Let alone outside of this room.”

“M’not asking you to wear it out.” Niki rolled her eyes. “I just wanna see it on you.”

George scoffed, tossing it back to her. “No.”

“Darling, you’ve worn a dress before. Granted, it was only ‘cause you wanted to make Q feel comfortable, but—”

“Woah, woah—Alex wore a *dress*?” Dream broke into a laugh, deriving one from George and Niki.

“We dared him to and George didn’t wanna make him feel out of place, but, yeah.” Niki giggled. “Technically, he did.”

“Don’t you *dare* tease him about it.” George scolded, having Dream lightly throw his hands up in defence.

“C’mon, *please*?” Niki jutted out her bottom lip. “For me?” She tended the dress to George.

George relented a breath, cocked his head to the side before slowly standing up.

Dream gawked. “Oh, there’s no way—” He strenuously spoke through a laugh, receiving George’s middle finger when he walked towards Niki to grab the dress. “—this is—please invite me to all the wardrobe preps, Your Highness.”

Niki gave him a thumb up as George heavily sighed, disappearing into his bathroom.

“I can’t believe I’m about to see him in a dress.” Dream chuckled to himself once he and Niki were left alone.

“I’ve only ever witnessed it that one time, but *man* did he do it justice.”

In all honesty, Dream wasn’t sure what he was expecting the dress to look like on George, he just found it amusing that he was willing to try it on for Niki’s sake.

“I’ve been meaning to thank you, Your Highness,” Niki said, tearing him from his thoughts. “For yesterday. It wasn’t fair to have you sit through that—my mother’s remarks, as well as my own. And though my boys are aware of how....mean...she can be, I appreciate the cover-up.”

Dream sent her a soft smile. “No worries, Princess Niki. Genuinely.”

What he wanted to say was that he understood—that he hadn’t hugged her out of pity because he knew that was the *last* thing anyone would want in that situation.

“Right.” Niki nodded with a bashful smile, deriving a chuckle from Dream. “And I, um, also wanted to thank you for...what you’re doing. For George.” Dream’s brows furrowed. “I’ve known him for a very long time and...I’ve seen him at his worst—at his...lowest point.” She inhaled quietly. “But I’ve also seen him when he was a ball of light and you’ve somehow managed to bring

that back, so,” She cleared her throat. “Thank you.”

Dream had never known the initial light that Felicity, and now Niki, mentioned George having, but the shown gratitude for being the catalyst of its return, Dream couldn’t help but feel an immense amount of pride—not having him feel pompous but honoured.

“I’m just...sticking around, in hopes that it’ll help. Everything else is all him.” Dream nodded slowly.

A grin stitched her lips. “I know.”

A silence encased them, one that was quickly interrupted when George stepped into the doorway of the bathroom.

With one dramatic hand on the doorframe, the other on his hip, bare where the dress was slit, George said, “What do we think?”

Frankly, Dream thinks his heart has gone into cardiac arrest. The black dress barely reached George’s mid-thigh, the fabric ribbed his build—slit on either side, starting from his mid-riff to a few inches below his hips. Cream skin complemented with the black, a leather thigh belt at his right thigh.

“You are so annoyingly pretty, I am going to lose my mind.” Niki strode towards him after picking up his crown from where he’d left it on the shelf of the fireplace. “Where’d you get that?” She nodded to the leather belt around his thigh before fitting the crown on his head.

“Found it in the shit you leftover in my drawers, like, ages ago. Figured if I’m doing this,” George shrugged, moving past her and towards the grand mirror next to the fireplace. “Might as well go all the way—” He tilted his head to the side, his crown tipped with the curtains of his fringe. “—fuck, I’m hot.”

Dream’s breath caught as did their gaze in the reflection of the mirror—the corner of George’s lips tugged up into a cocky smirk.

Niki must’ve caught it as she glanced at the two of them. “I’m gonna get some water and rethink my life choices,” She patted George’s shoulder. “Thanks for plummeting my self-confidence, King.”

“Do not call me that,” George muttered.

It was when he had turned around that Dream was positive he wasn’t breathing; George’s skin on display, the very feel of it filling the space of his hands this morning—the soft skin against his lips.

Dream wasn’t sure when Niki had left, gaze fixed on George’s reflection.

George’s grin developed with Dream’s silence. “How do I look?”

Dream’s gaze flicked up to his. “G-Good.” He found himself squeezing his locked hands from where they sat in between his legs. “You look...you look great.”

George simpered, turning on his heel to block their reflection and to face Dream. “Yeah? You like how it fits?” Dream inaudibly swallowed but nodded. “C’mere.” He invitingly nudged his head.

Dream recollected himself as he gradually stood up from the bed before reaching George, hands

hesitantly to himself. George suppressed a laugh, tilting his chin up to look at him. Dainty hands dressed in rings found their way to Dream's respectfully crossed ones, untangling and sitting them where George wanted to feel his touch—Dream felt his heart rate jump at the coldness of George's bare waist against his palm.

"You've got, um," Dream found himself unable to raise his voice above a whisper, their breaths lingering in their space as George kept his hands on Dream's, guiding from his bare waist to the small of his back. "got the legs for it."

George tucked his bottom lip between his teeth. "Something tells me," He slid Dream's hands down to just above his ass, where the slit continued—alabaster skin smooth against his calloused palms. "you weren't *just* looking at my legs."

"Maybe not." Dream uttered, breath hitched when George had his palms flush against his ass. "George—"

"Are you..." George stumbled into him when Dream failed to suppress the urge of filling his palms with the familiar softness they'd known that morning. "...you objectifying me, Dream?" He teasingly asked through a grin.

Dream knocked his forehead against George's. "I'm worshipping you."

George's grin was wiped and replaced with parted lips, doe-eyes to siren's in a nanosecond as he tugged onto the fabric of Dream's shirt; walking him back into the lounge chair before lightly jutting him down onto the seat. "Wait here." He mumbled against their lips, reluctantly backing away from Dream's touch to walk over to his dresser.

Dream was too stunned to manage words, allowing his back to fall flat against the headrest of the lounge chaise; viridian fire followed George's every movement, every defined curve of his body, every inch of exposed skin as it moved over the muscle. It made the constraint in his briefs worse and when George returned to him, his hands were quick to grip the back of his thighs.

George chuckled through a hum, voice stolen by the unopened condom tucked in between his teeth. George dug one knee at the side of Dream's thigh as Dream rested his chin onto his clothed stomach. Refined fingers carded through blonde threads as Dream pressed lingering kisses down to the hem of George's dress, the obscenely low cut rising just above where the lewd outline of George's erection showed itself.

Dream kissed the clothed tip, causing George to shudder; his palm small, but cruel in its tight grip on Dream's shoulder; a faint crinkling of the condom wrapper followed with every squeeze, his free hand clutching Dream's hair as a pleased breath coursed past his lips. While kneading the muscle at the back of George's thighs, Dream kissed down to where the leather belt contrasted against George's ivory skin.

Dream was too lost in his carnal-addled haze to have noticed the circle-shaped steel clasping the belt around George's thigh, and he still hadn't noticed it when he captured the leather band between his teeth, tugging onto it.

He *noticed* when George's thigh jerked against him, a hiss followed by a breathless, "Ow."

Dream immediately pulled away, looking up at him with slightly wide eyes and blown out pupils. "Fuck, are you okay?"

George's eyes were fixed on the source of his shock, breath ragged; Dream glimpsed down and

noticed the burn the clasp left where it constrained George's thigh.

Breath of fire—Dream glanced up at him. “That’s never...I’ve never been able to do that before, I didn’t know...”

Dream knew he could exert his innate fire through his hands and project it into any piece of steel, but through his mouth—that was something only Fireborns in the highest position of the hierarchy were able to procure.

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” George’s cheeks were pink, a small tug at the corner of his lips as he said, “Felt good. Feels really fucking good.”

Though he had been assured, Dream brought his lips to George’s clothed cock, kissing down its rigidity, deriving toiled breaths from him as he did so. Dream’s hands continued to knead the back of George’s thighs and he *knew* his touch was burning him when George’s breathing danced between gasps and yelps.

And Dream *revelled* in the sound—sounds he was reeling out of George when they were only just getting started.

Dream hadn’t blacked out since the first time they slept together, but he realized it happened again when he felt the coldness of the condom encasing him, jolting him awake. He blinked up at George who had both his knees caging Dream’s thighs in.

George hooked his finger underneath his chin, tilting it up. “You okay?” His smirk grew when Dream remained wordless. “Lost you for a sec, didn’t I?” He giggled, leaning down to brush his lips against Dream’s ear. “If you lose control,” Dream squeezed the grasp he’s apparently had on George’s ass this entire time. “Let it happen, Dream.” Strenuously speaking against Dream’s lobe, George repeated, “Let it happen.”

Through a hazy gaze, Dream watched George re-situate himself on his lap. And he couldn’t even put into words how his brain short-circuited when the hem of George’s dress had ridden up to his hips, his ass pushing up Dream’s cock with every rut—painted fingernails digging into his thighs for support.

Dream sunk into the seat with a grunt, one hand gripping George’s waist and the other on his asscheek. George’s soft moans were followed by every stroke of Dream’s tip against him, edging the both of them for the pleasure that began growing ever since George put that dress on.

Dream’s eyes drew up from where his hands kneaded George’s fat, watching his spine snake itself with every arch of his back, and watching the crown on his head dangerously close to slipping off. The teasing remained for a little longer until George threw a hand back, stroking Dream’s cock before inching himself in.

Blacking out happened in moments where Dream was unwilling, almost, in allowing himself to perceive that he was in this situation *with* George. Because George was *George*, point-blank. But the sheer fucking shock that ran through Dream when he first caught him in that dress—the way it glorified his build, still remained through every nerve—and it wasn’t getting easier with George on his lap, riding him from the back.

And Dream couldn’t even bear how fast he’d finish if he caught sight of them in the reflection of the mirror, somewhere he knew George kept his gaze fixed to watch *him*.

George ground onto him slowly—tantalizingly slow. And if Dream were honest, it was driving him

fucking insane. And Dream knew that George knew that because George *wanted* to see him lose control so he could regain it—at full force, unforgiving.

George looked over his shoulder, caught a glimpse of Dream's avid regard as they fixated on the obscene image of George taking more and more of him. Dream's gaze drew up to meet George's and he broke into a breathless smirk before a desire stronger than himself took the hand from George's ass to lightly grip his neck, pulling George's back flush against his chest.

George sucked in a sharp breath as their foreheads collided over his shoulder. "Dream, fuck," He glimpsed down at his stomach where Dream's arm snaked itself, pressing George against him as he bucked his hips up; George lolled his head back, his Adam's apple bobbed against Dream's palm as Dream began fucking into him, heartbeat-like intervals going into a pitiless rhythm.

George's hands fumbled for support before he brought one to the top of Dream's head where he gripped tightly, the other wrapped around his own cock; Dream caught a glimpse from over George's shoulder, translucent white coating itself on George's tip, using as an assist to Dream's merciless rhythm: the more progressively rough Dream would get, the more it tipped the crown off of George's head until it slipped off completely, falling to the floorboards with a clang—wholly ignored in their circle of heat.

Their moans escalated in decibels as they chased their looming euphoria; George turned his head in the restraint of Dream's grip on his neck to interlock lips. Their strokes were messy, spit-licked skin transposing to the corner of their mouths which remained parted—George's moans muffling themselves in their intermingled heaving breaths.

The last thrust sent George into overdrive as his thighs squirmed around Dream, his brows knitted and their interlaced breaths sucked in as George trembled into the clutch of Dream's arm. Dream's lips slipped to George's jaw where his breath hitched as he bucked his hips into him a couple more times, George's fingers loosening in the entanglement of Dream's hair as he recovered from his high while Dream came undone, a throated moan muffled in the curve of George's neck.

Their shallow breaths filled their silence in the time that George involuntarily ground against him, Dream weakly lifting him up to pull out entirely.

"Oh f-uh-..." George hung his head to look down at his lap. "...*fuck.*"

"What?" Dream breathlessly asked, looking over George's shoulder to catch the tainted mess on the black of the fabric. "Oh, shit."

George stifled a laugh, hand shielding his eyes before he hid them in the crook of Dream's neck. "She's gonna kill me."



The water nearly brimming the bathtub sloshed around them as Dream pulled George further onto his lap; George's arms slung themselves around Dream's shoulders as his legs wrapped Dream's torso.

"This is healing up quick." He traced the faded scar on Dream's cheek.

Though George was blasted that night, he remembered the hit Dream had taken for him and the many more Dream landed in return. At the time, he was shaken up after witnessing a Fireborn's temper in action, but at this point in time, George felt honoured—and *mildly turned on.*

Dream frowned, "It's a good thing you're a Waterborn 'cause," glancing down at George's waist

through the water where he passed his fingers over the fresh burns. “these are going to heal quickly, as well.”

“I hope not,” George mumbled.

Dream flicked his gaze to George’s. “...*What?*”

George chuckled, bopping his nose with a soaped finger. “I like them. Gives my skin character.”

“Your skin is flawless and I’m ruining it.” Dream countered.

George rolled his eyes. “It’s been *‘flawless’* for too long. It needs some battle scars.”

“Except they’re not from a battle, are they, now?” Dream spoke against his curved lips.

George cradled his face, giggling into the space of their ghosting mouths. “Definitely in an act as rough as one, fucking hell—” Dream snorted, dropping his forehead against George’s collarbone which shook against him as light laughter encased them.

After a moment, “George?” Dream beckoned and George hummed in response. “What’s that?”

George pulled away from him slightly to follow his gaze, discerning the letter peeking from the pocket of the slacks he wore prior to slipping into that dress. “That...would be my mum’s letter. To me. At least...I think it’s addressed to me...I don’t know. I’ve just been carrying it around with me everywhere I go.”

Dream half-smiled. “When did you find it?”

“Remember the night you came to mine? Drunk out of your mind?” George watched Dream instantly cringe as the memory surfaced. “That would be when.”

“*You’ve got mail,*” He remembered Dream slurring out that one night; back then, George found it irritating, but as he looked into forest green irises, he couldn’t help but endearingly smile down at Dream.

“God, that feels like ages ago.” Dream muttered.

“Does, doesn’t it?”

Another silence passed them.

“Why are you holding off on it?”

George averted his gaze; silently panicking, but calm on the outside. Dream seemed to have known better, watching George attentively as his dainty fingers passed through the water.

Another silence.

George wanted to say, “*Because I still don’t have control over my addiction. Because if I open that letter, I might relapse. Because I don’t trust myself not to fall again. Because of the way you looked at me last night when I told you I didn’t take the drugs. Because last night has me craving drugs now more than ever. Because I want a drink so fucking bad I feel like my head’s gonna fucking explode.*”—but George looked across the water and into Dream’s softened gaze, and he fell back on the raw confession.

Instead, George settled for somewhat of a white lie—*because as long as I don’t have to burden you*

with my murderous mindset, then I'm being good.

Before George could speak, Dream said, "You don't...have to tell me. I know you don't—like—you've never really spoken about her. At least not with me."

"No, no, it's...it's fine." George smiled softly. "I'm just not sure what there is to talk about." And as he contemplated going into the whole ordeal that had built itself a home inside his head ever since Anthea left, the words glided off his tongue because the white lie *was* part of his truth. "Sometimes, I feel like there's so much to say that I don't want to say anything at all, you know? And I know I've already accepted it, but being drunk or high for so long, even more so after her funeral, I was convincing myself otherwise—fuck, that's why I hate collective breakfast, by the way. Having to sit there, just makes it all feel too real—makes her passing *feel* real and I just *feel* like that's still her seat. And when I feel everyone's fucking eyes on me, I can tell that they know it too. We all know it. She's the only one deserving of that crown and I know that it was inevitably to fall into my hands—and I *know* that I am going to honour it one day, but for now, it still feels like it's *hers* because it all happened *too soon*, Dream."

Dream's chuckle wavered after a moment in which George recollected his breath. "Did that feel good?"

Partially, George thought as he still felt the anvil that weighed on his shoulders ever since that instance last night in his closet.

But still, George stared back at him through a blurry gaze, *he did feel partially good*. "What are you doing to me?"

Dream grinned, shaking his head. "I'm not doing anything, George. It's all you."

In a course of partial admittance, George shakily breathed out, "I just miss her."

"Fuck, c'mere." Dream pulled him into his embrace and George felt horrible knowing he wasn't telling him the whole truth, especially when Dream was being this sweet. "You know," He rubbed circles onto George's back; the warmth returned when the water cascaded in droplets from the tips of Dream's fingers and down his spine. "With the step that you took yesterday?" He spoke against his shoulder, George winced where Dream couldn't see him—*don't make me talk about it. Please*. "I think you're ready to read the letter." George pulled away from him slightly. "I think you might've been left in the dark for too long and...it could help." *Fuck, fuck, fuck*. "You don't have to, obviously, but." Dream slowly shrugged.

"I think I can handle it," George whispered, *I can't handle it—I'm scared to even test my limits*. "Um, but, can you read it to me?"

Dream's eyes widened. "What—are you...sure? Don't you wanna—"

"I just feel like I won't make it past two words without breaking down." George puffed out because—*that part was wholly true and it lifted the anvil off by a fraction*.

Dream studied him for any sign of retaliation but to no avail. "Okay," He nodded, water sloshing around with them as he extended an arm out of the bathtub to grab the letter.

Once in hand, George re-situated himself so his back was pressed against one end of the tub, Dream filed the letter out before moving back as well, sinking into the backrest on his end.

"There's a..." Dream pulled a familiar silver chain, accompanied by a pendant. "...necklace in here."

George brought his knees to his chest, the bathtub squeaking against his skin. “Yeah, I’ve only ever seen her wear it, like, once.”

Dream analyzed it for a few seconds before placing the letter in between his lips and unclasping the necklace, leaning forward as George fell into his insinuated actions—the cold of the necklace kissed George’s skin as he studied Dream’s features while he clasped it around George’s neck.

George glanced down at the pendant, twirling the crystal in between the pad of his thumb and forefinger.

“I’m gonna start reading it now, okay?” Dream hushed, unfolding the letter once he received George’s gaze, followed by a hesitant nod. “Um,” He cleared his throat, George felt his heart rate pick up with anticipation until he saw a smile crack at Dream’s lips. *“If you’re reading this, then I was right in addressing this letter to you and you only...you sneaky little shit.”* A laugh bubbled past George’s lips, bittersweet tears already forming over his eyes; that was when he knew he was totally and utterly screwed. *“In knowing you and in knowing myself, I will keep my words to you short and brief. I’ve never been good at expressing my feelings, let alone through writing—let alone to you, my son, who loses himself in countless novels about visceral emotions and who thoroughly understands them like the angel that you are .”*

George returned one arm with the other that hugged his thighs to his chest as he suppressed his tears. Hearing her voice through every recited word gliding off of Dream’s tongue was shedding off the shield he’d built around the memory of her ever since she left. And George had never felt so bare in this bathtub, faced with his lover and the rawness of his emotions on display.

“I’m sorry to have left so soon. You have been in the darkness for a while now and I am only closing you in by leaving such responsibilities in your hands, with no guidance—so consider this the most that I can say in order to push you along, as I believe that you are capable and intelligent enough to figure it out on your own. I have reason to believe—” Dream abruptly paused.

George looked at him instantly; his soul surprisingly yearning for his mother’s words, only to be met with the fear behind viridian. “What?” He noiselessly asked.

Dream swallowed, glancing down at the letter as he shifted in his seat. *“I have reason to believe... that King Sebastian wants me gone.”* The two of them locked eyes over the dancing water that seemed as if it stilled with the elapsing seconds around them.

“Go on, Dream,” George said, unsure himself if he wanted Dream to proceed.

Dream sighed shakily before continuing, *“When you see this, approach the matter lightly, strategically. He’s not an easy man to defeat. I advise you to start searching for answers with his... eldest son, Prince Clay,”* They timidly looked at each other again, almost as if the name sounded alien to the both of them. *“Again, approach lightly, strategically. You may not be a warrior at heart, but you’ve always been smart. I wouldn’t be telling you this if I didn’t think you were the only one capable of flawlessly executing my orders, so,”* Dream huffed. *“Make Salacia proud, make that crown yours...own it.”* George’s breath expanded over the water that grew cold with the passing words. *“You’re not to just honour me in your kingship but in relations. Your father and Felicity will need you just as much as you’ll need them. Take care of yourself—you know in which way I mean.”*

George’s eyes fluttered shut—this was the precise reason he was stalling to open her letter: the reiteration of his problem.

“And no matter how selfless it will feel, no matter how draining, you were born to be a lover,” A

breath was reeled from the both of them. “Own it.” Dream’s tongue slicked his lips as he briefly paused. “*This Kingdom needs some of that light you made shine so bright as a kid.*” Dream mindlessly added, “There’s an indentation,” before continuing, “*Enclosed is a necklace. I’ve already left something for your father and Felicity, but I want you to get these smelted into two pieces of jewelry—one for you and for my other s...son.*”

Quackity, George breathed out tersely.

“*Inform Alex about the matter at hand, whether or not you would like to inform your father is at your own discretion. Love each other, help each other—and take King Sebastian down for good, son. I left the crown in your hands for a reason. Own it...*” Memorizing Anthea’s inked words before her sign off, Dream swallowed hard, locking eyes with George as he recited, “...*King of Salacia.*”

Chapter End Notes

i suffered the five stages of grief writing the smut in this chapter 🤔

said there was gonna be angst in this one, but that turned out to be false, so that's a good thing for you guys isn't it? too bad that means it's still looming over us.

thank you for the nice, as always. treat yourselves really fucking good. til' next update
x (:

My Body Is a Cage

Chapter Notes

this was *lightly* edited, soz for the typos, there shouldn't be too many. x

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



Minutes passed and George had yet to say a word.

And whatever Dream read from those loose notes in George's copy of Kafka's diaries showed itself in the averted brown eyes, and the water that grew cold with his silence, and the stillness.

Everything was still. Not just George, but the bathwater—it was swaying, as it should—until it wasn't. *Everything went still with George.*

“George?” Dream attempted.

He didn't think he needed to use much power in his voice to call for his attention in the quietness of this bathroom, but George didn't move.

“George.” Dream beckoned, a little louder this time.

Nothing.

Moving forward slightly to reach for him, Dream hushed, “Hey—” but his wrist was reprimanded in George's grip.

George's touch was always gentle; caresses instead of scrapes, grazes instead of scratches, squeezes instead of grips—but not this time. Dream's wrist grew prickly with the ice exuding George's palm.

It almost stung, fire meeting ice—it almost took Dream out.

George snapped out of it, then, locking eyes with Dream and immediately letting go of his wrist. “Sorry.” He breathed out, gaze softening.

Dream shook his head. “No, it's okay. It's alright—are you alright?”

Dream felt like he knew him fairly decently to confidently tell that George's “Mhm.” was probably the most disingenuous thing he'd heard coming out of his mouth, especially when it was accompanied by an empty smile.

Empty smile, Dream thought he'd never see it return on the ivory skin of his lover—*not when you're sober.*

Because then it becomes a problem, doesn't it? Because this is you. This isn't what the drugs are doing to you or maybe it is, but not because you are on them right now. And maybe that's why the drugs are doing this to you—because...you're not on them right now? Whatever it is, this is you or

it isn't you?

Dream narrowed his eyes on him. "It's okay if you're not, George, you just read—"

"No, uh—um, obviously," George tripped over his words.

George was talking but George wasn't there—his tone stagnant yet unstable.

"Obviously, what?" Dream calmly returned.

George was looking at him but George was looking elsewhere.

George lightly raised an eyebrow at him after *seconds* had passed following a simple question.

"Hm?"

Dream shivered where he sat, whether that was from the ice in the temperature of the water or the one within George's gaze, Dream wasn't sure. "George, I feel like," He chuckled uncertainly through the slight chatter of his teeth. "Like you're not here with me right now."

George blinked at him until his shoulders slouched with his exhale. "Sorry. That letter, um..." He forced a smile. "...threw me...off. But, um," He cleared his throat, cradling Dream's face, making the cold worse. "Thanks, for...reading it...to me."

Dream's eyes fluttered as he nodded. "Of course."

Whatever worries he had towards George remained, despite the assurance he tried passing over to Dream, but with the growing ice around him, Dream couldn't manage to parry.

George cocked his head to the side. "You're shivering. We should...get out."

An extended soft hand helped Dream out of the tub, followed by the same hands that wrapped him in a towel and passed him clothes. Dream tried to understand how George was the one clearly needing assistance but being the assisting one instead.

Because you're not asking for help. Dream followed him attentively, just as he had last night in the same trajectory of the walk to and fro the bathroom. *Then again, when have you ever?*

"George," Dream beckoned for the second time in the last ten minutes—*maybe if I say your name enough times, you'll come back from wherever you are.*

But the distant look on George's face when he turned away from his dresser to look up at Dream stated otherwise.

"Are you sure you're—"

The door to George's bedroom swung open to reveal Quackity.

Quackity cleared his throat, eyeing the two of them. "Dinner, George."

The breath that George released followed by his eager hand around Dream's own reinforced the question Dream wanted to ask but was promised by George's very actions that he wouldn't receive an answer to any time soon.

George tilted his head to the side. "Hungry?"

Dream flicked his gaze to Quackity and found the raven-haired boy with furrowed eyebrows,

studying George as if he, too, seemed to be confused about *something*. “Yeah...” Dream veered his eyes to George’s. “...yes—always.”



George held his hand throughout the entirety of dinner.

Last time that happened, Dream didn’t think too much of it—he revelled in it: the idea of George always wanting to touch him in some sort of way.

But when the corkscrew popped off of the wine bottle that Cole called in, Dream noticed how George squeezed his hand before leaning into his side, all unintentional, but all inclinations of which Dream *understood*—from second-hand experience.

Relapse is dancing too close to you, isn’t it? Dream glanced down at George, catching his deceitful smile before he lost it to George nestling his head against his shoulder.

It wasn’t until he caught following eyes in the corner of his own that he spotted Quackity, eyeing them—more so, George—before his gaze fell to George’s plate: *full, untouched*.

“Try this.” Dream broke his attention from Quackity when they briefly met eyes only to look away instantly.

Forking the gratin on his own plate, Dream nudged it to George. George rolled his neck back slightly, shaking his head.

“C’mon.” Dream gently ushered. “It’s—what’s that thing you always say—*delectable*, it’s delectable.”

When the gratin touched George’s taste buds, Dream was brought back to the first time he’d made that omelette for him; the initial disgust due to his reluctance, quickly followed by the surprise of his challenged defiance.

Dream grinned. “*Right?*”

George rolled his eyes, dropping his head back onto Dream’s shoulder.

“More?”

George’s cheeks brushed against the fabric of Dream’s shirt when he nodded, causing Dream to readily fork more gratin before feeding it to him. As George savoured the taste, Dream briefly looked over the brunet’s head to catch Quackity’s gaze; expression undetermined before he looked away from them for good.



George hadn’t spoken much during dinner. *Actually, George hadn’t said a word since they left his room.*

Dream didn’t think much of it, dialling it down as George’s mind busied with Anthea’s inked words. But when it came to goodbyes at the front door of the Salacia palace when Dream stated that he should probably return to his realm, George was still wordless.

“I’ll see you tomorrow?” Dream brushed his knuckles across George’s jaw, earning a faint nod in return.

George leaned up against Dream to press a chaste kiss onto his cheek, squeezing his hand before fully pulling away. Dream received a wave goodbye, accompanied by a smile that furthered his perplexity.

Dream lingered in the foyer for a moment as George jogged up the stairs because—*something didn't feel right...did it?* He decided to dismiss it, again, on the account of Anthea's letter—that *must be it: he never talks about her and that just opened up a fresh wound.*

He's fine. Dream convinced himself as he descended the staircase leading to the Salacia courtyard. *He's okay.*

The door creaked open behind him, a ray of light from the palace's foyer spilled out before Quackity stepped in between.

There was a moment of silence in which the breeze rolled past between their firm eye contact under dim lighting.

"How long are you planning to stay?" Quackity finally asked, earning immediate confusion in Dream's expression. "With George."

Dream wasn't sure how to answer *him*. "I..." And maybe because this was out of the blue .
"...*what?*"

"It's not rocket science."

"Yeah, but it's not exactly a 'yes' or 'no' question, is it?" Dream countered.

"Do you want me to word it that way? 'Cause I can—do you plan on staying with him forever?"

Dream wasn't sure how to answer him—because he had an answer for Karl, that night in the atelier. And he was sure of it.

"Y-yes." Dream hated how hesitant he sounded, precisely because of Quackity's reaction.

Quackity veered his glare to the side, shaking his head. *Is that why you were staring during dinner?* Dream studied him carefully, *are you worried I'm going to leave him?*

"Why are you asking me this?" Dream broke the silence.

"Because of how George is acting." Quackity was quick to answer, glare fixing Dream in his spot. "And the fact that you were practically having to spoon-feed him during dinner."

Dream furrowed his eyebrows. "I don't understand—"

"He's reliant on you," Quackity spoke this statement with a twinge of malaise, one that transposed itself onto Dream. "And you don't even know him that well."

"I think I know him pretty well—"

"Oh, yeah?" Quackity raised his chin challengingly. "So, you know why he's dead quiet, then? You know why he didn't say a word during dinner?"

"He's...just going through some shit right now." Dream wanted to argue, wanted to win whatever challenge Quackity pumped through his question, but he wasn't sure himself if he *did* know George.

At least, not as well as you do, I'm assuming. Dream waited on Quackity's answer when the boy's lips pressed into a thin line—a vision of him maintaining his composure; something Dream was familiar with when around his father.

“He's overwhelmed.” Quackity sighed.

All fury and challenge desisted. Dream kept his eyes on him, Quackity diverted his to the floor.

“Sometimes, he gets too overwhelmed and he has a hard time getting his words out, so he just... doesn't talk. Not by choice, not really. He just...*literally* can't bring himself to speak.” Quackity shifted on his footing and Dream, at that moment, saw the boy in a new light—a *worried...kid?*

Brother.

Anthea viewed you as a son, George is protective of you as you are of him—it all settled within Dream the longer he watched Quackity dwell on his words.

“It doesn't last for too long. Two days max.” Quackity glimpsed at him before re-averting his gaze. “It doesn't happen often, either. Very rarely, actually. Last time was when he was around sixteen.”

Two days. Dream couldn't even think about missing George's voice. Not when his main worry was the condition itself—you *can't bring yourself to speak?* He glanced down at the ground. *Was it my fault? Did I push too hard by suggesting you read the letter? Did that throw you over the edge?*

“Still wanna stick around?” Quackity ripped him from his thoughts, earning his felled gaze.

Dream answered assuredly, this time—knowing full well the root of his discourse. “Yes. Of course.”

Quackity's jaw set. Dream stared back. A silence rolled past before he received a nod from the boy and his absence behind the closed doors of the palace.

On his way back to Vulcan, Dream remembered his conversation with Karl.

“Some things could come up, push you away as you grow to—” Dream had cut him off but Karl was to finish with, *“—to know him.”*

To know you, Dream thought of the stillness, the beaming smile, the ice, the warmth of his embrace in bed, the harsh grip, the caressing fingers through his hair—*this is you, it's all of you.*

The good. The bad. *George's duplicity, his dormant fury, his everlasting kindness.*

And if silence was George for the next two days, Dream would be silent, too—but *with* him.

In the meantime, he set out for the preparation of Verenalia. And not the festival itself, but rather, his planned gift to George.



George was so fragile that the mere sight of *wine*, of all things, had him shaking in his seat.

George was so fragile that he was on the verge of tears when Dream was feeding him at the table.

George was so fragile that when he went to lay in bed without Dream at his side, he *broke* into tears.

He wasn't worried about Dream not being there—he needed to go back to his own palace at some point—whether that was to tend to royal duties, or whatever—but George was so *fucking* fragile.

It wasn't entirely the letter that triggered the looming comedown of *missing* drugs, it was him—his undefeated addictions that would always live within him.

He had started taking the drugs and now the drugs were taking him and his brain felt like it was on fire.

And at the rate at which he got out of bed, covers ripped off, and began pacing around his room, George knew it wasn't the same as that time in Violette's study. *At this moment, he was aware—fully aware.*

The cloy of Mephemeta was entirely drained from his system—*this was all him.*

That was the problem, though. It was the sobriety mixed in with everything else that was going on. It was the way Dream looked at him when he didn't believe George hadn't taken the drugs. It was his mother's reminder of how she wanted him to stop his shitty coping mechanism.

It was all of it and more—the stress of awaiting The Nether's response, the looming battle that his mother wouldn't be able to help them fight in—all of it was being processed through his sober mind and it was driving him *insane*.

Especially when that part of him returned. The moment he tried to say goodbye to Dream, but couldn't muster the words.

You can't know how unstable I am. I can't let you worry more than you already do.

But he'd have to see Dream tomorrow, and he'd have to speak to Dream at some point, and he knew this condition was a temporary bump in the road every now and then, but this was yet another thing he had to shield from Dream. Another issue on top of the many others that lived within him.

And he hated it. Hated that he couldn't tell Dream because it reminded him of the look on Quackity's face every time he'd let it slip that he wanted to leave this godforsaken world. He hated bringing his unwillingness to live and watching it corrode worry and pain in his loved ones that wanted him around.

He fucking hated it.

And when he went to vocally express his frustration, nothing but mere stutters left his lips. And it made him want to rip his hair out and scream and *break* things and *all* he wanted was a goddamn *drink*.

George didn't even realize someone was in the room with him until he felt Quackity's hand on his shoulder.

He tried speaking Quackity's name, the consonant resting between his tongue and the roof of his mouth. Quackity shook his head, understandingly, dismissing the need for George to push himself.

When he was sixteen, George was awaiting the Kingdom's psychiatrist for the very condition that currently vexed him. Quackity could sense his nerves, staying close by his side. There was a brief conflict where Quackity was still learning how to express himself through physical affection and George not being able to do it verbally.

And now, as Quackity lifted his curved hand in the shape of half a heart, George was brought back to that day—the day Quackity couldn't bring himself to go as far as hugging him but wanted to express his love and support by stating that he could also stay silent *with* him.

George glanced down at his curved hand and a choked, soundless chuckle left his nostrils before he curved his hand in the other half of the emulated heart, connecting it with Quackity's own.

Quackity dropped his hand after a moment only to make the bottom of a triangle with his thumb and forefinger, raising his eyebrow suggestively: *paper football*.



Karl didn't need to be told of what was going on with George because the moment he walked into his room to find him and Quackity playing paper football in silence and suppressed laughter, he was brought back to a similar situation years ago.

He joined them, quietly. Picking up the notebook from Quackity's lap where a bunch of name-callings was being scribbled alongside the scoring system.

Sometimes, when George got this quiet and they joined him in his quietness, Karl was almost thankful. Sometimes, it would get too loud in the Kingdom, but he and Quackity were conditioned to look past it, to breeze past it—not George, though. And it was a soothing realization.

He watched his delicate fingers wrap themselves around the balled paper, which George deftly tossed in between Quackity's fingers which imitated the goal. *Soft, gracious, and gentle*—even when he cheered with both his fists raised, earning Quackity's playful glare, which George met with a tender smile.

You're too kind for this world, Karl admired him before quickly returning his eyes to the notepad, adding a tiny streak next to George's score.

After a while, George had excused himself to the bathroom, in the time of which Karl met Quackity at the bedroom door.

Quackity dropped the side of his finger from where he'd nervously bitten down on the skin to softly ask, "He should be good by tomorrow, right?"

Karl's smile was gentle. "It's never been anything too serious. There's just a lot on his mind. He'll be okay tomorrow. And if not, the day after that. No doubt."

Quackity pursed his lips to the side, dwelling on the reassurance before nodding contentedly. "Yeah, fuck. You're right." He huffed before patting Karl on the shoulder. "See you tom—oh, fuck. I might've also told dog boy about George's condition."

Karl grunted. "*Dude*—"

"I just feel like he doesn't know half the shit he should and George is already, like, really fucking into him, you know?"

Karl lolled his head back to look at Quackity directly. "It's not exactly your place to say, but at least Dream knows what's going on so as to not...say or do the wrong thing—anything that'll overwhelm George."

"Yeah, more than he already is."

Karl squeezed Quackity's arm, "He'll be fine. Get some sleep," Quackity reluctantly turned to make way towards his room as Karl said, "See you tomorrow." before the door closed in between them.

"Quackity gone?"

Karl whirled around to be met with George, timid where he teetered on his footing in the doorway of his bathroom.

When he offered him a nod, George let out a deep breath, lightly striding towards Karl who already had his arms open.

Karl has been through this with George before and he never really questioned it when George spoke to him with no issue whatsoever when he couldn't do it with others. He figured it was because George knew him the longest, but after Dream revealed that Karl was George's anchor, it all made sense.

"Karl." George breathed out onto his shoulder.

Karl squeezed George's frame. "You wanna talk about it?"

"Yes, please." George exasperatingly said.

Karl nestled his eyes into George's shoulder.

"I feel like I'm going fucking crazy."



"Dear God." Karl let out a deep breath after George recapitulated the contents of Anthea's letter.

George ran his hands through his hair, dropping his back against the headboard, reclining his head.

Karl was sat cross-legged, facing him; bringing his hands to cup George's knees as a memory resurfaced. "Wait, she referred to Alex as her son."

George blinked a few times before breaking a half-grin. "Yeah."

Karl retrieved his hands, "Speaking of," sitting them in his lap where he watched his own fingers fiddle with the hem of his shirt. "he was worried about you, you know?"

George's eyebrows shot up lightly with a faint tilt of his head. "I worry about worrying him."

Karl studied him for a moment before quietly asking, "And what about loverboy?"

George caught his eyes and they remained in a felled gaze for a moment.

"He was, like, spoon-feeding you." Karl chuckled lightly. "I don't think I've ever seen that before. Between two grown people. It was, like, weird? But also kinda sweet." George's lips began quivering until Karl noticed the glint in his eyes, causing him to lurch forward lightly. "Shit. What? What did I say?"

George shook his head, waving him off. "No, I'm—it's...fuck..." He sucked in his tears with a sharp breath. "...I feel like...all I make *him* feel is worry." Karl watched the glossiness sheath brown irises almost instantly. "And you know how he makes me feel?" He swallowed after taking a sharp inhale. "He makes me feel like I actually want to *taste* the food I eat, makes me want to

drink things that feel less toxic going down my throat—he makes waking up desirable again and he’s brought life back into things I considered dead and gone and I think I love him.”

It was George’s stream of consciousness, one that was burning in his mind for way too long for how he admitted such a big thing without taking a breath.

“And this *stupid* fucking Metanoia link is making me feel like a dickhead because he’s *stuck* with the mess that I am—I am so fucked up and I’m not getting better. And you said it yourself, if I don’t get better, I can’t give him that. And I can’t let him go but I know I need to because watching him hurt is so fucking unbearable. And I know he’s at home, right now, thinking about me and all *I* can think about is getting drunk or high—fuck, Karl, I want to get high so bad, I feel like my head could burst.”

Karl released a breath so heavy that it could’ve held both their tension in one. “When did this urge come up?”

When George didn’t answer right away, Karl was instantly worried.

“When, George?”

“Couple nights ago, or something.” George huffed. “I came across the drugs I took the night of—”

“You told me you threw them away—”

“I *thought* I did. I swear, I thought I did, but I must’ve still been out of it when I told you that—I don’t know.”

“Do you still have them?”

“No, I washed them down the drain. Dream can attest.”

“So, then...?”

“I didn’t take them because I knew he was still here. In my room. But Karl, the look on his face when I told him I didn’t take the drugs...it’s like he didn’t believe me at all. And I care about his opinion so much now that...that fucking broke me.” George’s voice was strained through his aching throat. “He makes me want to quit them, but the way in which he has the ability to do that is making me want to do them even more. Fuck, I’m not making sense—”

“No, I get it.”

“You don’t have to say that—”

“I’m not just saying that,” Karl assured. “I think you’re so scared of that anticipation, you know? The one that lives between the moment in which you’re contemplating relapse and the moment that you’re sure it’s going to happen. All because you are *terrified* of hurting him. So, you wanna get it out of the way. You wanna just relapse, get that part over with and convince yourself that you never deserved him—”

“Because I don’t—”

“I think he begs to differ, George.”

Whatever George was going to counter with was snapped back with a revelation of his own following Karl’s word—almost like whatever Karl said made allusion to what Dream had assured

him of once.

“You gotta talk to him, okay?”

George puffed. “I can’t, Karl. It’s like...the night after Neptunalia when I essentially flat out told Quackity I couldn’t wait to...leave this place for good—and fuck, the hurt in Quackity’s face? I don’t think I can bear to see that on Dream’s.”

“I think not saying anything will hurt him more, handsome.”

George relented a breath, leaning his head back. “Even if I try, I’m just gonna start stuttering again. I practiced his name earlier and I couldn’t get past the first two letters.”

“Talk to him when you’re ready. God knows, he’ll wait for you.” Karl nodded assuringly, earning George’s quick defiance. “Because he knows you’re worth it. You’re too harsh on yourself and you *want* to take the easy way out because you’ve always been ready to accept defeat. But I’ve told you this before and I will say it again, handsome—” Karl cupped George’s face. “—you are the *strongest* person I know. And in Anthea’s words? *Own* that shit.”

George scoffed out a terse laugh, shaking his head in the constraint of Karl’s hands as they stared at each other with growing tears.

After a moment, George wrapped his hands around Karl’s wrists, fixing the gentle grip on his face as he said. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

George paused for a moment, eyes flitting across Karl’s features. “For not loving you the way you loved me.”

Karl’s heart most definitely skipped a beat at that moment and he felt like a piece of him died within their shared gaze.

Chuckling nervously, Karl dropped his hands from George’s face. “That’s...it’s...ok—it’s alright.”

George shook his head before gently cradling Karl’s cheeks, “Look at me,” He fixed their stare and Karl had to try his best not to break right then and there. “I’m glad it wasn’t me. I would’ve ruined you and you deserve *so* much better. And I can’t *wait* for you to find the *best* love there is.” He brushed Karl’s cheeks and Karl had no choice but to stare back into the eyes of the person he’d been enamoured with for years. “Because you deserve that and *so* much more.”

Karl tried to pull away as he shakily chuckled, “George—”

“And you will find it.” George held Karl’s head up when he tried to look down. “And whoever that person is, I will be so fucking envious of them.” Earning a breathless laugh from Karl, George echoed the sound just as gently.

Karl always thought they were the epitome of ‘right person wrong time’ because he believed that in another lifetime, in another timeline, *in another universe*—they were together. Encircled by the silence that sheathed them—the room still—their smiles beamed through teary eyes.

It was letting go of a hope that had his heart locked in barbed wire for years. Karl knew nothing was ever to come out of their friendship, but hearing that George *wanted* to but his inability to consider himself good enough *for* him had Karl borderline freaking out over the surmounting

emotions.

Looking away from him for the sake of pushing back what could've been non-stop tears, Karl glanced at the clock.

"It's almost one in the morning." Karl cleared his throat, tears prickling the longer he felt George's hand on his face. "We should probably—"

His words were reprimanded when George leaned in to press a gentle, lingering kiss on his cheek.

Karl was too shocked to allow the tear to fall and when George pulled away, all he could manage was, "What was that for?"

George smiled, dropping one hand from Karl's face. "It's officially Verenelia," He shrugged, retrieving his other hand. "Mandatory kiss."

A silly tradition they'd come up with in a drug-addled haze—the festival of love generating the need to be each other's dates or initial kiss of the day.

"Right." Karl hung his head, cheeks hot. "Forgot about that." Looking at him, Karl caught George's squint. "Okay, I didn't forget, but I thought it wasn't gonna happen this year 'cause of loverboy, you know?"

George chuckled. "It's tradition. And it's on the cheek. He'll be okay."

Another silence settled with an elongated gaze, one that held so many muted words that they didn't need to vocalize because of their mental connection.

"Will you stay until I fall asleep?"

Karl nodded. "I'll stay until you wake up."

George's smile reached his eyes as he leaned forward to wrap his arms around Karl's shoulders. "Thanks, Karl. For everything."

Karl chuckled, resting his head against George's. "Thank you for trusting me."

"You make it easy." George sighed into his shoulder. "You make it all feel okay."

Δ

"Did you gift wrap this with your own hands?"

Dream rolled his eyes, looping his leather belt around his dark, cherry red slacks. "What?" He turned around as he did the buckle, locking eyes with Sapnap, who held up George's gift. "Put that down."

"Answer my question—"

"No, Sap, I wrapped it with my dick—no shit, I wrapped it with my hands." Dream turned back around to face the mirror, undoing the first few buttons on his white dress shirt.

"I know *damn* well you didn't just take that tone with me," Sapnap jokingly glared at his reflection, pulling a smile on Dream's face. "Is that the reason you're acting all cagey? The person behind the gift?"

George.

Dream hadn't seen him all day. And he supposed a part of it was his fault, but having to go to the messenger to catch him before anyone else did had him anxiously waiting on his return from the Overworld so that the book didn't land in the wrong hands.

He spent most of his day beating the non-existent life out of the punching bag in the training room. Spent hours making food that he didn't eat and tossed Sapnap's way, instead.

Dream had also not seen his father, but that was more a privilege than a downside.

"I'm not acting cagey."

"You kinda are, bro." Sapnap reached his side, eyeing him down.

Dream let out a huff, taking his own reflection in; hair dishevelled, his face less pale than a few days ago, which he supposed was a good thing. "Do I look good?"

"I don't relate to King George in any way, shape or form, but shit, if you always looked like this, I'd also keep you cooped up in my palace." Sapnap teased, landing a firm tap on Dream's shoulder blade.

Dream laughed, ruffling Sapnap's hair as he passed him and muttering, "Later." to which Sapnap returned, "Yes, sir." before he left Dream to his mild distress.

He never thought the day would come where he understood his mother's love for Verenelia and receiving gifts on this precise day—and though he didn't understand it from her standpoint, he understood whoever had been on the giving end.

Which, come to think of it—"Oh." Dream thought back to the conversation with *Felicity—was the 'whoever' in question.*

A few minutes rolled by and Dream was practicing how he would present the gift to George and when he caught a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror, he realized he looked borderline insane.

"Jesus Christ," He huffed to himself before walking over to the mirror, fixing the cuffs under his suit jacket.

There was a creak followed by a shadow at his door, one he wholly ignored and excused as a passing Vulcan but when two knocks sounded against the doorframe, Dream looked to his right.

Dressed in a lacey, red dress shirt accompanied by black slacks; the outfit entirely complemented with its adorning jewelry—and *of course*, the crown that circled loose, soft chocolate curls on an even softer countenance: ivory sweetness, dark honeyed eyes—*George*. Dream was so enraptured in the sight of him that George's beaming smile gave away his staring.

"Hey." Dream uttered.

If he wasn't already hyper-focused on George's lips, Dream wouldn't have heard his "Hi."

And Dream missed his voice so much; the weird accented words that warmed his core.

"I missed you." Dream turned on his footing to face George.

George giggled, shaking the statement off with bashfulness; a loose curl bouncing on his forehead before he looked at Dream again. He opened his mouth to say something but no sound followed.

Dream walked over to him, causing George's reply to remain hidden behind his now shut lips. He cradled his face gently and listened to the soft sigh that escaped him. Dream's eyes debauched in the pre-admired features from afar that looked even more breathtaking up close.

George opened his eyes to look up at him after he had been swimming in the feel of Dream's hands. Dream smiled down at him, as soft as he could muster because George looked...*quiet?*

No, you're just quiet.

But you look fragile.

"Quackity told me." Dream found himself, earning a rigid stare.

George averted his gaze, forehead creased as his jaw shifted with the formulating words that Dream knew he'd never get to hear—at least not now. *And that's okay.*

"It's okay." Dream whispered, caressing George's cheekbones. "You don't have to say anything." There was the return of that self-deprecating look George held in the dressing room, causing him to gradually close the space between them. *I miss hearing you talk, but I'm happy with just this—just being here, with you.* "C'mere, let's not talk about it." George rested the side of his face against Dream's chest, making his forehead accessible for Dream's lips to rest a gentle kiss. "You look beautiful, by the way." He spoke against the tender skin.

George's arm tightened around Dream's waist and if Dream listened closely, he could almost hear a slight whimper through George's breathing.

Ring-dressed fingers fiddled with the buttons on Dream's shirt before George glimpsed up at him, hushing, "Pretty."

Dream chuckled, pressing a delicate kiss over George's nose before speaking against its bridge, "Thank you."

When he fully pulled George into his chest, Dream caught a glimpse of the gift and decided against it. He'd gift it when George was ready to talk; *when I can not only see the excitement in your face but hear it, too.*



Verenelia was upon them—the one festival George got significantly blasted on but *couldn't* this time.

Eurus was fairly windy—assisting the circulation of air for its warriors and royals but also making the drapes surrounding the palace sway lightly. The doors leading to the backcourt made that possible.

The backcourt was how it always was whenever George would come here; peppered with the entirety of the Kingdom, George even wondered if some villagers snuck their way through.

Victoria was fond of hosting parties, whether that made men more accessible to her or another reason for her to excessively drink so she wouldn't pass as an alcoholic, George wasn't sure, but the back of the Eurus palace was always this busy.

With Victoria having helped Niki in the preparations of Neptunalia, the setting of the festival was nearly a spitting image of the aforementioned. This time, however, the colour scheme danced in a range of red and crimson tones; the drapes over the tents, the cherry-red spotlights surrounding the

statue of Venus—and the rows of red wine dressing the accent tables almost everywhere George looked.

George scanned the backcourt for his friends. *I just need to step away from you for a second or I'm going to drive myself crazy.*

“Fuck, Nick’s waving at me—I’ll, um,” Dream caught George’s eager stare as he thought, *you can go, please excuse yourself*—even if the last thing he wanted to do was let go of Dream’s hand. “Meet back up with you in a bit?” George nodded again.

A lingering kiss was exchanged before George watched him walk over to the group of Vulcan warriors—who were loud and boisterous in their cheers as they caught Dream. George couldn’t help the amused smile that danced on his lips as Dream’s guard and his warriors made a show of showering him in compliments—*which you wholly deserve for looking this good.*

And when he caught the glare Dream briefly sent over his shoulder, George’s hand flew to his mouth to suppress his laugh.



Where he was sitting on the velvety couch under a tent, tucked underneath Karl’s arm, George was *barely* hanging on.

Everywhere he looked, his temptation rose and rose until he felt like it had gotten so loud inside his head, all he could hear was a faint ringing noise. He wouldn’t dismiss the way Karl would occasionally tug him into his side as if he could tell George was drifting away to that dark place in his mind.

And George felt bad. He felt bad for bringing this onto Karl, Quackity, and Niki. He hated the way they quickly hid their drinks behind their backs when he approached them. *He hated being fragile and knowing that they saw him as such.*

And he wanted to partake in the conversations they were losing themselves in, but every time he tried to speak, *nothing would come out.*

It wasn’t weird for the three of them: George not being engaged in their conversation. In the past, George was either too mangled or passed out before the party even began, so his mental absence wasn’t *shocking*, but it was slightly worrying given this point in time—in which they all got a taste of the person he used to be and the rate at which they quickly lost it.

So, George busied his mouth with the plethora of water that pressed his liver.

And the timing of needing the bathroom had been almost perfect because as George looked over the room and noticed Dream rise from his seat, George immediately disposed of his glass before muttering, “Gotta piss.” to Karl before he purposely cowered and maneuvered through a crowd of people so he would go unnoticed by Dream.



When Dream reached the tent that he’d last seen George under, Karl shot him a half-frown, “You just missed him. He should be back soon, though.”

Dream would’ve waited, but the three of them seemed to have already been interrupted in their conversation by his presence and quite frankly, he wasn’t really sure he could contribute without George being there.

So, glancing over the room, he was thankful when his eyes caught a familiar fishtail braid—an interwoven lacey red ribbon through chestnut hair.

And Dream was brought back to the revelation he had when wrapping up that present—*if mom loved Verenelia so much, why did she never attend the festival?*

And that revelation coalesced itself with the rare sight of Felicity at Verenelia because Dream cannot remember the last time he'd seen *her* at this festival.

Tapping her shoulder gently, Dream was welcomed with warm regard as he once received under the saucer lights of the Salacia kitchen.

“Ah, Dream,” Felicity turned in her seat, muttering a quick excuse to two other women before she gave him her full attention. “You look quite handsome, don’t you?” She tugged on the hem of his sleeve, deriving a soft chuckle from him.

Dream bowed his head slightly, tucking his hands behind his back as he offered a tight-lipped smile. “And you look stunning, Felicity.”

Felicity dipped her chin, cheekbones high with a humbled smile as she looked up at him. “You are too much—and to what do I owe the pleasure?”

Dream cleared his throat, overlooking the dance floor as he said, “I hope this isn’t too weird, but,” He returned his gaze to her, tending his hand. “May I have this dance?”

Felicity broke into a grin before bowing her head. “You may.”

Her skin was soft against his when their hands interlocked as Dream helped her from her seat. He stepped aside and allowed her to move forward, receiving a giggle from her that warmed his heart.

Because that’s what he hoped to achieve—in honour of his mom and the love she shared with Felicity, to which Felicity wholeheartedly returned, Dream wanted to give back—despite being a few years late.

“You know,” Felicity began once she had interlocked her fingers behind his neck, Dream kept his hands lightly on her waist, guiding their swaying. “Though I’ve not known you for long, I can tell your mother was right.”

Dream’s brows knitted as he tilted his head slightly.

“You are quite the charmer.” Felicity beamed, causing Dream to momentarily point his grin to the ground before looking at her again when she said, “If only she could see how that grew into the man you’ve become.”

Dream’s shoulders slouched under her forearms as he released a noiseless sigh.

He could see the sadness behind her wine-drunk eyes, attesting to the very reason she was here and not at wherever her and Violette would be spending Verenelia were she still with them.

“Now, why did you ask me for a dance?” Felicity shot him a knowing look before tilting her chin up; despite wearing heels, she was still fairly short. “What do you know, little man?”

Dream’s tongue slicked over his canine as a grin etched his lips; his eyes veering to the side before he reposed them onto hers again. “Just that...” He pursed his lips, offering a small shrug. “...I’ve attended every Verenelia and this is the first time I’ve seen you here.” Felicity’s eyes fluttered shut

with a guilty smile before she squinted at him. “And the funny thing is, I can’t recall a single time I’ve seen my mother here, either—now—”

“Okay, okay.” Felicity playfully rolled her eyes with a giggle that interlaced itself with Dream’s laugh. “You caught us.” She bit her bottom lip, shaking her head. “We’d ditch this and have our own little party in her study. She knew your father would be here,”

They both simultaneously looked over to their right where Sebastian seemed to have taken his eyes off Queen Victoria to look at them; exchanged between three pairs of eyes was a unanimous feeling of pure hatred and in a flash of a second, when Dream and Felicity returned their gaze to one another, the tension dissipated.

“And so, we didn’t have to worry—we were in our own little world. It was...” Felicity swallowed, eyes mindlessly flicking down to Dream’s frown. “...it felt...magical.” She looked up at him.

Dream dwelled in the gloss of her eyes for a moment before speaking—not wanting to overwhelm her, “You know how she had superficial mood swings? B-because of her, um, condition?” Earning a small nod from Felicity, Dream concluded, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen her as genuinely happy as she was on Verenelia,” Felicity’s eyes fluttered with the brimming words she could almost already hear gliding off of Dream’s tongue as he said, “And I think that’s all because of you.”

“Oh, lovebug.” Felicity breathed out a shaky breath before lightly crashing her head against his chest.

Dream wholly ignored the looks they may have received as he wrapped his arms around her, transferring whatever piece of Violette that lived within himself, onto Felicity.



Though he did need to piss, George zipped up his pants and remained sitting on the lid of the toilet for a good ten minutes recollecting himself.

Quite frankly, there was nothing more he wanted in that very moment than to blow his fucking brains out.

Upon realizing that Dream was gonna eventually worry about his whereabouts and seeing as that was the last thing George wanted, he exited the stall and almost *exactly* at the same time, Sebastian stepped out of the stall next to him.

“Oh!” King Sebastian broke into a laugh, George immediately got a whiff of alcohol. “King George, what a surprise.” And glancing down, George caught the glass of whiskey in his hand.

Is it really a surprise? In a communal bathroom? You fucking bellend—George quickly transposed what was dwelling into a glare and forced a smile. “Hi.”

Fuck. George quickly moved to the sink. *He couldn’t do this.* He flipped the tap open as Sebastian mirrored his actions next to him. *Please don’t fucking talk to me—*

“So,”

You shithead.

“Enjoying the festival?”

George caught Sebastian’s look in the mirror they shared and he pushed another smile with a firm

nod.

George was already so overwhelmed that this combination of a situation was pushing him over the edge. The rocks crumbled down the tall cliff with every glance he stole at the whiskey glass which was dangerously close to his own hand. And it didn't help that the one person who wanted him dead and gone was right beside him.

And you could kill me right now. "I've never been too fond, but," Sebastian shook his fingers over the sink before flapping the tap shut. "It's good to destress, us Kings." *No one would hear my screams, not over the music, not from the bathrooms being this far from the dance floor.* "We tend to forget to let loose every once in a while." He had walked over to the paper towel dispenser and brought one for George, "I think your hands are quite clean, now, don't you?" He asked through a chuckle.

George hadn't realized he'd been obsessively scrubbing his hands until he looked away from his focal points: Sebastian and the glass of whiskey. Maybe he was keeping his hands busy because it would be too easy to reach over and drain that glass of its contents.

Nervously chuckling, George said, "Y-ye...yes." flipping the tap down and taking the paper towel from him.

Keeping his eyes fixed on him, George nearly flinched at the sudden grip Sebastian had on his shoulder.

"You alright, son?"

And then came another worry on top of what was already pushing him over the edge because—*I don't want you to think that I'm scared of you.* George couldn't let the damage control all cease over the fact that he couldn't speak to save his own ass, so without thinking he brought his free hand up and barely wrapped it around Sebastian's, giving it a light squeeze.

"Mhm." George repeated with a smile and a nod.

For what it was worth, the touch George initiated derived a soft smile from Sebastian—momentarily soothing his worries—no matter how much it killed George to be this close to Sebastian.

"You're sure?" Sebastian, if George didn't know any better, looked *worried*—it was an act, but it wasn't an expression he thought plausible on the man's face. "Do you need me to get you anything?"

And it took *everything* within George, in that exact moment, to muster out, "No, sir."

Firm. Said with a smile. No nerves on display.

"Well, alright." Sebastian gave his shoulder a small squeeze before both their hands parted from one another. "See you out there."

George gave him a bow of his head, watching attentively as he exited the bathroom.

And he almost let out a breath of relief until he veered his gaze from the door to the glass of whiskey Sebastian left behind.

George forgot how long he stood still like if he moved an inch he wouldn't be able to hold himself back from clearing the glass.

And he went for it. Eyes tear-filled and his heart racing, George reached for the drink. But almost like a godsend, in the most paradoxical sense, the doors to the bathroom creaked open.

George was quick to retrieve his hand, snapped out of his trance and met eyes with Sebastian.

Sebastian sent him a warm smile before pointing to the drink. “Almost left this behind,” He chuckled to himself, walking over to fetch his glass, eyeing George carefully as he did so before he exited the bathroom for good.

A punched-out breath left him, one that contained all of the surmounting stress suffered through Sebastian’s presence. Short for breath, George paced the bathroom, recollecting himself the best he could before he would have to eventually leave the safety of this place and meet with Dream —*Dream*, who still had no idea what a *fucking* wreck George was.



George barely looked at him when reaching Dream, wrapping his fingers around his wrist before tugging onto it.

“Woah, where are we going?” Dream chuckled, lightly tugging him back.

It took everything within him to meet Dream’s gaze but George forced himself to, accompanied with a tight-lipped smile. He leaned up to Dream’s lips, engaging in the most salacious kiss he could attempt so as to put forward the next best thing to tame his temptations since all he could think about, now, was that glass of whiskey.

“Oh,” Dream breathlessly said when George pulled back. “Yeah, okay.” He laughed lightly. “Was gonna ask you to dance, but you know what?” He giggled against George’s chasing lips, hands squeezing George’s waist as he hushed, “Let’s get out of here.”

George wished he could. Wished he could dance with him, would have loved for the feel of Dream twirling him, making him feel free—but with his soul caged within himself, George *needed* to leave and shut out the madness in his mind in the only he could without causing worry for others.

George left without wishing Karl, Niki, or Quackity a goodbye, but he’d last seen them on the dancefloor and figured they would’ve been fine without the notice.

Dream carried him bridal style through the mildly busy village, not a royal or warrior in sight, which should have made them more aware, but where George lay soundlessly in the space of Dream’s hold, and with Dream stealing occasional glances at him, neither of them could care less.

Maybe it was George’s brain on fire, reeling him of all senses, that had him shamelessly kissing Dream’s neck, cheek, temple, anywhere he could so he wouldn’t have to be faced with the reality of his problems. And simply hearing Dream’s flustered giggles gave him a momentary escape from the mindful chaos.



Vulcan was the quickest way to one of their residences and the second Dream opened the door to his bedroom, George was quick to re-engage their lips; sloppy and rough was every stroke.

Lips spit-licked, Dream pulled away slightly, “George,” chuckling through a breath as George’s hands wasted no time in shrugging off Dream’s suit jacket, unbuttoning his dress shirt. “Fuck, what’s gotten into y—” George stole the remaining words from his mouth as he brought Dream’s hands to the buttons on his own shirt, urging him to be just as pressing.

I don't want to think.

George pulled Dream by his neck, lips hungry for his exposed skin as he pressed a trail of wet kisses down to Dream's collarbone.

I don't want to talk.

Dream lightly nudged him onto the bed, George's back was swallowed whole by the mattress before his legs naturally parted for Dream to fit himself in between them; shuffling the both of them up so that George could rest the back of his head on the pillow.

I don't want to be mentally present.

Rough lips found their way to George's neck, dainty fingers pulled onto Dream's hair, their breaths intermingled in their space, shortened with every stroke of Dream's hips against George's.

And it was working, this mental escape.

His fingers tracing down George's bare stomach, Dream breathlessly hushed against his temple, "You're beautiful."

Until it wasn't.

And he wanted to cry with the look Dream held when he glimpsed down at George.

And George was sure he was trembling when he gently brushed his knuckles against George's jaw, whispering, "You are *so goddamn* beautiful."

George was trying *so fucking hard* to pull himself out of how deep he'd fallen for Dream—or for Dream to prove him wrong—for the hope that he could let go and free Dream, but *this*—Dream kissed George's forehead, rolling his hips against George's before speaking against the warm, soft skin, "All and every part of you is."—*this was breaking him.*

Stop being, George turned around in the space of his arms to lay on his stomach, *so gentle,* he propped himself on his elbows, facing the pillow which soon absorbed the teardrop that fell from his face, *with me.*

Dream didn't move for a second, most likely confused with the sudden switch in position, but a savouring kiss was pressed into the dip of George's shoulder blades before Dream interlaced their fingers, digging them into the mattress.

And though Dream was still being loving, gentle, and wonderful, at least, now, George wouldn't have to face him with a tearful gaze.

Prove me wrong. George bucked his hips back against Dream's own before rutting against him, deriving an increase in the rate at which Dream ground against him. *Be rough with me.*

But even if he was rough, even if he desisted all attempts in being delicate to fulfil George's silent request, Dream had still said those things and those things lived in every tear staining the pillowcase underneath George.

When Dream bottomed out, George was momentarily brainless—for a brief second, the pain dissipated with the feel of Dream's attentive strokes; the grip he had on George's shoulder while the other squeezed George's hand, digging them further into the linen.

George was impatient, however—pushing his ass flush against Dream’s hips, grinding with fervency; he didn’t want to rush Dream or any part of this, but he wanted to feel all of Dream at full force.

And whatever was transpired through his desperation had travelled into Dream’s conscience as Dream re-positioned himself behind him, pulling George on all fours with a tug on his shoulder.

George’s free hand gripped the bedsheets at sudden when Dream’s languid strokes switched to thrusts; the muscle at his v-line smacking George’s ass dead-on, knocking grunts from the both of them—grunts that dawdled into moans as Dream turned his jabs into a consistent, merciless rhythm, the lewd sounds escaping their carnal circle.

One thrust had George’s hand loosening around the bedsheets as it slipped from under him, causing him to crash into the mattress, knees giving out from underneath his weight as the pillow assuaged his flushed cheeks. Dream briefly pulled out, deriving a whine from George as he already began to suffer cravings of his sweet escape.

Until Dream loosened his grip from George’s shoulder, loosened his grip around George’s hand to lay both his palms flat into the dip of George’s back, lightly pressing George into the mattress before slipping himself in with no remorse for tenderly inching in—*and it was exactly what George had hoped*—the touch that scalded the dimples in his back, the roughness of every thrust as Dream pounded into him.

When Dream fucked on his prostate, George’s yelp muffled itself into a moan in the softness of the pillow; his nails scraping the fabric of the bedsheets before it filled his palms. The rate at which Dream thrust into him had George barely having to do anything, allowing Dream to take and take, as much as George wanted him to—*needed* him to.

And tears brimmed his eyes when his grunts barely sufficed in exuding his growing euphoria, that familiar warmth building itself in the pit of his stomach with every jut of Dream’s hips until the sheets were tainted with what was once pre-cum into a beautiful, sheen mess.

Dream must’ve noticed the way George’s fingers ceased around the fisted bedsheets, causing him to slow down before he stopped entirely. But knowing that Dream hadn’t yet finished and *knowing* that he wanted to be fucked until he couldn’t feel anything, George reached his hand back to grip Dream’s waist, keeping him in place.

“George...you’re...” Dream sat back on his ankles, taking a glimpse at George. “...fuck, you’re crying—are you okay?”

And the answer should’ve been, “*not really*”, but Dream wasn’t asking about that—Dream wondered if George was hurting. If *he* had hurt George. And he was—in a painful way that felt so fucking addicting that George broke into a smile, eyelids slit as he nodded assuringly.

Dream wasn’t convinced, but before he could say anything, George pushed himself back onto Dream’s cock, causing Dream to jerk in his seat; hands quick to grip George’s waist.

“George—”

“Please,” George whispered, borderline whimpered; he rolled his hips back against Dream’s own, wincing at how sensitive his skin felt around the size of Dream. “...please, D-Dre-Dr’m.”

And though he was coming down from his high, muscles mellowed into the mattress, the realization that he managed to say Dream’s name, despite the stutter, had him a slight bit relieved.

Dream was hesitant and when he pulled out, George thought he was ending it on the account of his tears, but the pain kissed all of his nerves, igniting every inch of his soul when Dream gripped George's ass, kneading and digging into the skin as he rode out his own high.

George's shielded his broken soughs into the space of the pillow, his tender prostate rekindled with every unforgiving thrust following Dream's grunts.

George could no longer find support in fisting the bedsheets, his hand flailing for any other surface until Dream harshly juttet into him once, causing George's palm to dig itself against the headboard, *twice*, causing George's free hand to aimlessly reach his right where he accidentally knocked over Dream's lamp, the amphora of the vase crashing onto the hardwood.

The noise was wholly ignored when Dream jabbed in one last time, causing George to gasp out of the sheer shock that set his body aflame, hands trembling prior to going rigid over the churned-up sheets as Dream filled him.

The pain was nearly unendurable, dizzying him out.

"Fuck," Dream breathed out shakily before gradually pulling out, reeling a slow hiss from the both of them. He hovered over him, brushing the hair from where it stuck to George's tear-stained cheeks. "George—"

It took everything within George to crane his neck back slightly, barely catching Dream's lips where he pressed a slipping kiss; humming in assurance.

George felt Dream kiss the dampened hair that stuck to his temple before the warmth was alleviated from his back.

"I'll be right back, okay?"

George couldn't even reply not because of his condition, but because his brain was so hazy that he couldn't utter out words.

George struggled a *tad* bit when sitting up from where he had apparently dozed off because when he glimpsed down at his stomach, the proof of that senseless fuck with Dream had disappeared off his previously tainted stomach and thighs.

Dream was nowhere to be seen, and for a moment, it rose a small wave of panic within George until the door creaked open and he caught George's stare. "You're awake." George looked down at the glass in his hand and his heart swelled when he discerned golden liquid: *fucking apple juice*. "Got you, um." He walked over to George's bedside and that's when George noticed that the broken pieces of the lamp had also been cleaned up. "Apple juice," He passed the drink to George, who mindlessly took it from his hand as his eyes remained fixed on the ground where part of his mess used to reside. "I hated that lamp."

George looked at him instantly before a wavering smile grew on his lips, almost at the same as Dream.

"My dad designed this whole room, so he picked it out." George sat on the thought for a moment before nodding slowly, bringing the rim of the glass to his lips as he took a small sip. "Hey, um," Dream's brows furrowed as he reached over, caressing a hand up George's thigh, sheathed by the duvet covers. "You're sure you're okay, right? I didn't...want to get that rough, but I thought...it looked like...that's what you wanted, so—that is what you wanted, right?"

George swallowed the sip he'd taken as a grin pushed itself onto his face. "Yes," He whispered;

whispering was easy, made the words easy—Dream made a statement of letting out a curt breath of relief, deriving a small giggle from George before he added, “Dream.”

Dream looked up from where his gaze had fallen onto his lap. “Yeah?” Receiving a shake of George’s head, Dream broke into a faint chuckle. “Oh, were you...you were just saying my name?”

George nodded. *Because I can, now, it seems.*

A silence passed them and went right over George’s head as he lost himself in the taste of the apple juice; his throat dry and parched. Dream must’ve found it amusing because when George disposed of the glass onto the side table, he broke into a small chuckle.

And for fuck’s sake, George couldn’t help the smile that grew on his lips, you’re not making this easy on me.

George’s heart swam in every curve on Dream’s face, every little detail as he stared back at George with a growing smile, too.

“What?” Dream asked and George shook his head dismissively. “Um,” He cleared his throat, fidgeting with the drawstrings of his sweatpants as he said, “This is gonna sound...weird, but um,” He chuckled, glimpsing at George. “I kinda got you...a present?”

What. George blinked at him.

“My, uh,” Dream got up and walked over to his dresser, George took in a quiet breath. “Mom used to love receiving and giving gifts on Verenelia. I never really had a reason to uphold that part of her tradition and I don’t...” He returned with a gift-wrapped book, George followed him attentively as Dream sat down. “...I’m not expecting a gift, um. I just thought, now that I have a reason, I might as well. And, you’re the reason—I mean—you deserve a gift, for...for everything that...um, everything that you are.”

When George found himself pushing down a smile, he realized that rejecting Dream’s tenderness was harder than just accepting it, despite not wanting to hurt him in the long run.

“Fuck. Is this weird?” Dream spoke through an uneasy smile, through slightly gritted teeth.

George giggled, shaking his head as he curved a hand in the crook of Dream’s neck before leaning forward and applying a gentle kiss on his cheek.

He opened the present with care—the fact that it was gift-wrapped was driving him insane because Dream didn’t look like the type to *gift-wrap* something—beautify a present that would’ve sufficed if he’d just toss it George’s way.

And everything was fine.

The wrapping paper unveiled the engraved golden writing on the spine of the book and George’s heart momentarily stopped.

Until it wasn’t.

In his hands, George held the first edition of Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* and it was already so precious to him that it had him wanting to clutch it to his chest, shoo away anyone that dared to lay a finger on it.

But he didn't.

He remained frozen in his spot.

"I sent a messenger out into the Overworld—he kinda hated me for it 'cause the book's kind of rare, or something like that," George could feel Dream's wary gaze in the corner of his eyes, eyes that began welling up with tears as his heart sank in his chest. "Um, there's like, I mean I'm sure you already know this—but the seller said that this version had six uncensored poems that never made it to the published version...um...but you...probably..." His voice died down and George tried to reel back his tears because he could tell Dream noticed them. "...knew tha—are you okay?" George slightly lifted his head from where his eyes fixed the cover of the book. "Fuck, was this too much? I just thought you deserved—"

"I love you."

When Dream didn't say a word and only stared back: baffled and stunned—George wasn't sure if it was because those were the first audible string of words he'd fluidly spoken to Dream the whole night or if it was the confession itself.

Or if it was how he *delivered* the confession.

George wondered—as he held Dream's gaze through his blurring vision—if Dream knew that he wasn't professing, but rather, apologizing.

For I am sorry that I love you.

Chapter End Notes

accidentally posted this twice, my brain's fried.

hope you're all well. til' next chapter x (:

Solitude

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Dream didn't reply for a solid minute.

He didn't say, "I love you, too."

It wasn't because of George's confession, but rather what Sebastian said when Dream had gone down to fetch George a drink. What Sebastian had said made George's "I love you" sound deceitful.

Dream wasn't sure what to believe, at that moment: the fear behind the eyes of his lover or the fearless determination behind his father's.



Dream stopped dead in his tracks when he reached the archway of the kitchen; Sebastian turned away from the sink to catch his stare.

Sebastian took a seat on the stool. "You left early."

Dream narrowed his eyes on him before making his way towards the fridge.

"Why's that?"

Dream wholly ignored him. It wasn't an easy thing to do and solely for the fact that Sebastian was a goddamn menace.

Factual in Dream's mental statement as Sebastian pressed, "I saw you dancing with Queen Felicity." Dream kept his back to him, pouring the apple juice into the glass he'd fetched from a cupboard. "I had no idea you two knew each other." Dream returned the jug to the fridge, not once looking over at Sebastian. "How did that come about—"

Dream shot him a look, ripping the words from Sebastian's parted lips. "I came down here to get a drink. Not to have a chit-chat. Let alone with you." He picked up the drink from the counter, muttering, "If that wasn't clear enough." under his breath and headed towards the exit until his father spoke up.

"Would that drink be for your boyfriend?"

The last thing Dream wanted to do was spend any more than a second lingering in the same space as Sebastian, but he couldn't walk away from how that term was laced with disgust.

Dream turned around to face him as Sebastian said, "Correct me if I'm wrong, but from the way King George was ogling my whiskey, I'd say apple juice isn't exactly what he's parched for."

If it wasn't for the kitchen island separating the both of them, Dream would've already hurled him onto the ground.

Sebastian's smirk grew. "But what do I know?"

Dream fixed his stare on him. “Not as much as you think you do.”

“So, your lover *isn't* an alcoholic? Or...a drug addict?”

Dream slowly shrugged. “Your point?”

“You should be concerned.”

“Well, I’m not.”

“No, of course not.” Sebastian chuckled dryly. “Because you think you can fix him.” Dream scoffed, a bitter grin forming on his face as he shook his head. “Just like how you tried to fix your mother.” Dream’s glare returned to him in a flash of a second. “We both know how that turned out—and I’m telling you right now, you are *well* stupid to think it’ll be any different with him.”

“You don’t know him.”

“No, but I knew your mother. And she was an addict. So is he. They’re all the fucking same, Clay.”

“He’s getting better. He’s been sober for a while.”

“For *now*.”

“You don’t know what the *fuck* you’re talking about.”

“I’m looking out for you.”

Dream laughed, bitter and sour as his expression. “It *baffles* me how you’ve said that *twice* now and still expect me to believe—”

“I don’t get anything out of telling you this. I know I can’t control what you feel towards him. You’ve made that very clear.”

Sebastian’s malice was undetectable and it had Dream frozen in place, unable to look away from him.

“You just need to know that the reason I was able to give this Kingdom and Vulcan my all was because I didn’t try to fix something that was already broken.” Dream looked away this time, not because all previous emotions had vanished with the malicious statement, but because it sounded too honest for him to digest. “King George is a drug addict. He will relapse again and again and he’ll convince you that he’ll get better, but you cannot take his word for it because he is an *addict* and their words, especially the emotional discourses, *cannot* be trusted, you understand? You are going to *tear* yourself apart trying to piece him back together and it will stop you from getting what you’ve always wanted.”

The crown—freedom from you.

And it was the non-beneficial advice with the addendum of his father’s pride and incessant need to keep his image pristine that knocked Dream off his footing for a brief second.

“I am telling you this as your father,”

Dream wasn’t sure what ripped him out of his fury—a look on his father’s face, one he’s never witnessed, or the term he had last heard his father use years ago.

Sebastian was still being selfish, meaning that there was no ulterior motive to this talk. Despite fearing what will happen to Dream and how it'll affect Vulcan's preceding reign—you are still speaking from experience, one we both witnessed the downfall of.

"Every relapse of his will take a bite out of you—each bigger than the next." Sebastian eyed him carefully before firmly saying, "And it will *ruin* you, son."



As out of character as it was of Sebastian, Dream denied the looming advice ever since he returned from the kitchen.

Sebastian didn't *know* George. Didn't know that he washed the drugs down the drain, didn't know that he was *trying*. And he did mean the things he said. Which brought Dream back to the 'sorry' interlaced through George's affirmation.

George was overwhelmed. There were too many things going on in his head, Dream could tell. He remembered the day he noticed the dark cloud dissipate over George's head, only to return, greying his vision, stuffing his lungs and brain with acid.

So, Dream didn't say it back. Because that's not what George wanted to hear at that moment. If anything, Dream felt like it would only validate George's despair. But Dream wasn't sure what to say and George's silence was deafening, to say the least.

Before he could even muster a response, the door to his bedroom creaked open. Dream tore his gaze from George to catch Punz.

"Knock next time, will you?" Dream hadn't meant for the harshness in his tone to prevail, causing his features as well as his voice to soften as he sighed out, "What do you want?"

Punz stole a glimpse at George before saying, "Nick wants to speak with you. He's in the kitchen."

"Tell him I'm busy—"

"Says it's urgent."

"S'okay, Dream." George quietly spoke, peeling Dream's stare from his brother. "Go. It's okay." He nodded, offering a light smile—one that didn't mediate with the fear residing behind his eyes following his confession.

Dream frowned but nodded. "I'll be right back, okay?" George nodded assuringly.



George kept his gaze fixed on the sheets. He had so many thoughts swirling through his head and although Dream was making it better, he was also making it so much worse.

It wasn't the lack of response, but the fact that Dream *did* understand where the "I love you" came from; what lived within the three-word confession.

"Are you alright, Your Majesty?" Punz asked.

George hadn't realized he was still here when Dream had pushed past him to head downstairs. He looked over to catch a glimpse of Punz and immediately gathered the covers to sheath his naked upper half.

It wasn't that he was uncomfortable being half-naked in front of this near-stranger, but more so that he felt so exposed and raw following the night's events.

"Fine." George clipped, avoiding his gaze.

Punz lingered in the doorway until he spoke again. "Would you like a glass?" George's eyes flew to the bottle of Chardonnay in his grip, untucked from where it was hidden behind his back. "I probably shouldn't finish this on my own, so—"

"I'm alright," George answered too quickly, but if he hadn't, he feared he would crack.

And God, did he want to. If that bottle of liquor had a voice, it would be the most alluring thing George would ever hear. And his fingers itched for its cold neck, so he gripped the sheets around him instead.

"Fair enough." Punz sighed, turning on his heel to leave. "Have a good night, King George."

And there was a beat after another, from that point on.

George heard something slip from Punz's pocket, or his hand, and onto the ground.

A beat.

George craned his neck to look at what had fallen—a *clear packet*. Karl's packaging: a baggie George was familiar with. One he had held open over his bathroom sink not too long ago.

A beat.

George's eyes fixed on the packet.

Another beat—and George scolded himself—you better say something.

"Y-Your Highness," George weakly beckoned.

When Punz turned around, *that* part within George—the one that had his heart pounding with desire—ripped his gaze from the packet, in fear that Punz would catch what he had dropped. "Um. Have a good night, as well."

Punz broke into a smile followed by a bow of his head before he was fully out of sight.

A punched-out breath escaped George, grip loosening around the sheets as tears welled in his eyes.

The beat held his decision and decisions were made on two things, regardless of where you fell—*every decision you make is made upon either love or fear.*

Or both.

George ripped the sheets off him, rushed to the packet and salvaged it from the floor before shakily tucking it in the waistband of his boxers.

With the same shaky hands, George searched for a pen and ripped a piece from the wrapping paper, leaving a note so as to not leave without a word—because leaving was suspicious enough.

With a shaky hand, George wrote:

Didn't wanna worry Cole.

Thank you for the present, my golden boy x

- G



George rushed down the stairs, rushed through the foyer as stealthily as he could so as to avoid bumping into Dream. Rushed past the courtyard and traversed through the portal. Rushed through the village, traversed through another portal. Rushed past the foyer of his palace, jogged up the staircase, rushed to his room, slammed the door shut and strode towards his piano bench where he sat. Where he popped open the packet and stared down at the glistening white crystals.

A beat.

He could've sworn he heard the rewinding of a tape inside his head, constantly, as he slowly emptied a small portion of the powder onto the piano's fallboard.

A synth strung through as he formed a powdered line on the glossiness of the fallboard, lips parted in awe, eyes filled with avidity.

His soul missed the awaiting feeling. His soul grew warm at the sight of what would soon fill him, no matter how temporary.

George pulled his head up from clearing four lines, eyes brainlessly moving over the piano—*until*—his breath escaped him, followed by a slow smile that rose with his heartbeat.

George rolled his head back, blinked up at the ceiling, sucked in a sharp surprised breath from the hit at his core...and broke into a breathless chuckle.

A melody sang inside his head; soothing him off the bench as he slid onto the floor, laying on his back.

He thinks his heart could explode with the familiar warmth.

George sprawled out his arms, smiled up at the ceiling.

I know this feeling and I've missed this—I've missed you so much.

He giggled, brushing his hands down his face—*his soul was afloat.*

He couldn't worry if he tried. He was being hugged, held, comforted. He was whole.

Because George knows this feeling, and he's missed it, and it's gently kissing the touch-starved spots of his burnt soul.

However long this lasts,

George wrapped his arms around himself,

however fleeting,

He turned onto his side, knees drawing up to his crossed arms,

I am more myself in this moment than I have been in the last couple of days.

George brainlessly twirled with the music coursing past the record player, sounding out one of Anthea's records he would religiously hear every Sunday morning.

"Be my angel, 'cause you need me," He chorused, twirled in a half-circle, *"Be my angel, and treat me right,"* spun in front of his mirror, pointed at his reflection, *"don't say you love me, if you don't need me, don't send me roses on your behalf,"* pointed a finger to the ground, *"just take me down and walk through your river,"* slowly dropped down onto his knees, *"down the middle and make it last,"* wrapped his arms around himself, *"holding on to you, holding on to me, holding on tight, 'till my love is crossed...don't say it's useless and don't say forget it,"* sliding his legs from underneath him, *"you are my spirit,"* dropping his back on the ground, *"now you are gone."*

...

He muttered apologies under his breath, repeating them over and over again as he continually wrote the spoken word onto the tear-stained papers of his journal.

...

George hummed along to the piano melody, fingers dancing over the ivory bones, giggling out, *"Womp."* whenever he missed a note and the hammers emitted a wonky sound.

...

Book after book was thrown onto his bed, floor, and one shattered his mirror into tiny little pieces. The mess made was cleaned through a tear-filled gaze and after thirty minutes had passed, it was like no damage took place.

Thirty minutes had passed and the packet of crushed crystal reached a third of the way down.

...

Breathless in bed after having come down from another merciless dance session, George laid flat on his back.

He held the baggie up to his face, eyes filled with glimmering desire.

"My love," He whispered slowly, brushing his lips against the plastic, lightly prying it open before sticking his tongue out, tapping the side of the baggie to pepper a little more powder than he'd expected—*but he wasn't exactly complaining.*

He relished in the way it immediately numbed the back of his throat, then his mouth, and then his lips. He tossed the baggie to the side, eyes rolling to the back of his head before they settled on the roof of the bed's canopy.

Sandalwood. George sniffled, glimpsing to the pillow at his right. *Your pillow.* He brought a limp hand to the linen. *Your scent.* He rolled onto his side, slowly wrapping his arms around the pillow before clutching it to his chest. *Sandalwood and citrus.* He breathed the smell in, shuffling over so his stomach was pressed onto the plushness.

"Dream," George tightened his arms around the pillow, spreading his legs slightly as drug-powered dopamine guided his rut. *"Dr'm,"* He soughed, rolling his hips against the mattress, swimming in Dream's cologne that blessed his pillowcase.

George pulled away, heavy eyelids making for crescent brown eyes. He straddled the pillow, fisting the linen and grinding onto it slowly.

Bringing the tips of his fingers to emulate Dream's own, George traced his skin, then trailed his fingertips down his sternum, glancing down at the burns on his waist; thriving off the marks, augmenting the rate at which he rutted against the pillow.

Dream's name sounded through moans and broken whimpers, with each grip either on himself or the pillow tightening until he came undone—a euphoric mess having him gradually falling back onto the pillow, which he clutched onto—*sandalwood and citrus* lulling him from drug-addled mania to soundless sleep.



Returning to his room, Dream was stunned when his bed was empty. He checked for the bathroom and his closet, but George wasn't there. With his heart pounding in his chest, Dream paced, biting down on his nails before he spotted something in the corner of his eyes.

George had left a note.

And though he had every right to leave whenever he wanted, for whatever reason, George wasn't *ever* worried enough to leave in the middle of the night. It was his confession and everything leading up to it.

And maybe you need space. Dream thought when he slipped into the shower, wishing George was within arm's reach. *But fuck, do I absolutely hate how empty my bed feels when you're not in it with me.*



George had been too high to realize the looming consequences of his relapse, but as he woke that morning, knees to his chest and arms barricading them in place, his body trembled with self-disgust.

A rivulet of tears coursed down his cheeks. He felt cold, used by himself—which almost always felt like the worst kind of mistreatment.

This was all me. He tucked his head in between his parted knees.

There was remorse in everything that slowly came to him as he adjusted to his surroundings: the scent of Dream intermingled with the mess that stained his sheets; too high to have gotten up to clean himself off.

He felt *dirty* and the feeling wasn't unfamiliar; just one he knew the course of: *the euphoria, the comedown, the remorse, the relapse...and repeat.*



Dream didn't know how much time he *should* give George, but following something as serious as George's confession, he felt the need to see him soon.

So, stood at the doorsteps of the Salacia palace, a little after their collective breakfast, Dream awaited greeting.

Cole opened the door, surprised to see Dream. "Prince Clay," He bowed his head, brows slightly

furrowed. “This is...a bit of a surprise—Karl and I were sure you had spent the night.”

Dream narrowed his eyes on him. “Sir?”

Cole sighed, “Come in. Lot colder with how cloudy it is today.” and stepped aside to wordlessly let Dream in. “Karl was in Alex’s room and they heard George blasting music. Thought he might’ve been with you.”

Dream’s eyes veered to the ground. *George? Blasting music?* He wondered if asking about George’s mood when he returned home would only cause more confusion, within himself and Cole, it seemed.

“Oh, well...” Dream cleared his throat, mustering a warm smile. “...he left mine a little early. He didn’t want to miss collective breakfast. Didn’t want to worry you.”

Which wasn’t a complete lie, if he were to go off of George’s note, but from the way they both paused on each other’s countenances, the men seemed to know better—because they knew *George* better.

“Right,” Cole said under his breath, gaze diverted to the floor. “He’s upstairs, then.” He motioned to the staircase, “I’m sure he’ll be happy to see you.” offered through a kind smile.

Dream gave him a small nod. “Thank you, sir.”

“Just ‘Cole’ will do, son.” Cole patted his arm before moving past him.

Dream began making his way up the stairs until Cole beckoned for him.

“George is...he’s doing okay, yeah?” Cole seemed hesitant to hold Dream’s gaze. “He seemed a little out of it at breakfast this morning.”

Dream’s voice was too quiet to have placed any comfort as he said, “Yeah. He’s okay.”

I hate feeling and knowing that I am the wrong person to ask.

“You know...” Cole swallowed lightly. “...you know what I mean, right?”

Dream’s features softened, *that, he did know—for a fact.* “He’s doing more than okay in that department, Cole.”

A smile jerked at Cole’s lips, directed to the ground as he slowly nodded. “Good, good.” He cleared his throat, waving Dream off. “Off you go, then.”

Dream nearly made it to George’s door until he bumped into Karl in the hallway.

“Dream?” Karl’s brows knitted. “Did you just get here?”

Dream chuckled. “Yeah. Cole told me you guys thought I had spent the night.”

Karl’s eyes momentarily widened before a breath escaped him. “I mean, yeah—didn’t know George still had the energy for a party of one.”

Dream didn’t either. And the longer he was being unintentionally held back from seeing George, the more he wanted to *know* because George wasn’t exactly in a party mood before leaving Vulcan.

“Okay, well, I’m not gonna hold you back.” Karl jerked a thumb to George’s room, walking past Dream, but before Dream could advance, Karl spoke again. “By the way, wasn’t sure if I should tell you this, but because he’s not a regular, um—your brother, Luke? He purchased a fair amount of drugs from me yesterday.” Karl broke into a small laugh until he didn’t receive a similar reaction from Dream. “Fuck, maybe I shouldn’t have—”

“No, um. It’s fine. He probably...” Dream tried to find a reason, but Punz only went as far as drinking—never the hard stuff. “...wanted to go all out for Verenelia, or something.”

Karl pursed his lips with a nod. “Mm. Yeah. That’s what I thought. He most likely wasn’t doing it on his own, if that soothes your worry. Dude bought enough for, like, a group, I’d say.”

Dream managed a smile, shaking his head. “I’ll ask him about it later.”

Karl saluted him before turning on his heel, headed for the stairs. “See you ‘round, loverboy!”

There was a part of Dream that worried for Punz, but one that couldn’t be overtaken by the worry he currently had for George.

Still, if an addictive personality was hereditary, and Dream knew for a fact he hadn’t been the inheritor, it must’ve fallen onto Punz.

When he opened the door to George’s bedroom, Dream found him sitting at his piano: fingers dancing over the keys, a beautiful melody sounding off the hammers.

George’s fingers ceased as Dream shut the door. “Hey,” Dream heard him say through a grin before meeting his gaze. “Fuck, I’ve missed you.” He stood from the bench, striding towards Dream before lurching into his arms.

Dream chuckled, tightening his hold around George’s waist. “Hi,” He kissed his temple, earning a squeeze around his shoulders in return. “Why did you leave?” He softly asked as George pulled away.

George interlocked his fingers behind Dream’s neck. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I just...” He looked to the side, pursing his lips as he mused. “...I couldn’t get my words out, you were trying to be sweet like you always are—and *oh*—thank you for the book, by the way.”

Dream tucked a loose strand of hair away from George’s face. “It was my pleasure.”

George’s cheekbones rose with his smile before it slowly dissipated. “I’m sorry, I just felt like an idiot for not being able to speak words, you know?”

Dream’s eyebrows shot up lightly, “You’re talking a lot more now...” his gaze studied George’s own. “...that’s for sure.”

George moved his hands to place them on Dream’s chest. “Don’t sound too excited about it.” He sarcastically joked.

Dream playfully rolled his eyes before George lightly shoved him away with a small laugh. As George returned to the piano bench, Dream realized how everything leading up to George unpromptedly leaving, that night, hadn’t exactly been addressed. Or properly, at least.

George looked over his shoulder before patting the free spot on the bench he occupied. “C’mere. Play with me.”

From past instances, the word ‘play’ leaving George’s mouth almost always worried Dream, but there was something different about the tone in which he had said it this time. In fact, George’s whole demeanour was different and Dream hadn’t quite yet placed whether it was a good thing or a bad thing.

It wasn’t nearly as erratic as how George acted that night in Violette’s study, so Dream didn’t worry, he was just...*slightly perplexed*.

For one, Dream’s been trying to prove Sebastian wrong and he thought he didn’t really need to do that because despite feeling like the universe was constantly kicking him down, George was *still here*. Still persevering and pushing through.

But as much as Dream wanted to believe that George and Violette were different people, George’s ups and downs skidded a tad close to Violette’s instability.

But Dream didn’t worry. Worrying would validate Sebastian’s proclamations and Dream would be damned before agreeing with his father on anything.



“What?” George lightly gasped, taking the rings from Dream’s palm.

Dream wasn’t sure when to bring it up, but he’d smelted the necklace George left behind the night before.

“As per Queen Anthea’s request.” Dream chuckled, watching that shred of light return into George’s complexion.

George shifted where he sat on Dream’s lap when they had migrated to the bed, prompted by a kiss that had been prolonged into something they always craved from one another.

“I still haven’t decided how I’m going to tell him.” George chewed on his bottom lip, rolling one of the rings against his forefinger and middle.

“Are you gonna show Quackity the letter?” Dream looked up at him, mindlessly caressing a hand up George’s thigh.

George huffed. “Think I have to, yeah.” He transposed his gaze from the ring and glanced down at Dream. “Thank you for doing this, though. I wouldn’t have known how.”

Dream laughed lightly. “That’s okay. Kinda owe it to the guy.”

George’s eyebrows shot up. “Is this a budding friendship?” He teased, knowing very well of the tension between them, causing Dream to playfully squeeze his thigh. “Or ‘cause your father nearly ended his life?”

“No, it’s because he would never let anyone end yours.” George’s cheekbones grew prominent with his smile. “He makes my job easier.”

George scoffed, pressing his palms onto Dream’s torso. “I can handle myself.”

Though he knew George could most definitely handle himself, Dream playfully challenged. “Oh, yeah?” He propped himself up on his elbows, purposely jostling George onto his lap, causing him to steady himself on Dream’s shoulders. “With that pretty limp wrist and your dainty hands that aren’t made to handle swords?”

George giggled, bringing his arms up to emulate the stance of holding up his bow. “You forget,” He drew the imaginary arrow back, deriving a laugh from Dream. “that I’m quite the archer.” He let go, emitting the sound of the launched arrow before dropping his arms. “Could snipe anyone. *Easy.*”

Dream hadn’t meant to drift off into his earlier perplexion about George’s demeanour, but it wouldn’t leave him and it’s because he was never able to shake off his father’s voice no matter how hard he tried. And the one person who helped keep him afloat, the one person who shut all the noise out, was tied in with that worry.

Dream realized the consequence that came with George being the root of his control; the reason he loses it and the reason he regains it. And in times where George was losing himself, Dream was, too—and the Metanoia link that bonded them only intensified that.

“What?” George sniffled, reeling Dream from his thoughts.

“No, it’s, um.” Dream half-smiled. “It’s noth—it’s...” His tongue slicked his lips as he debated voicing his thoughts. “...are you okay?”

George blinked. “Yes.” Dream must’ve looked unconvinced because George rolled his eyes, pulling Dream up so their chests were pressed. “Stop,” He kissed Dream’s cheek, “worrying,” and his forehead, “about me.” hushing against his lips, “You do that too much.”

Dream’s sigh was caught between their lips when George stole a kiss, deriving a chuckle from the both of them.

George caressed his cheekbone against the tip of Dream’s nose, a tender breath followed, “I love you.” He whispered, placing another gentle kiss, just above Dream’s eyebrow.

Dream’s heart wrenched at the drawn-out syllables, hushed privately, pumping the blood through his veins as he parted his lips to return the words. He wasn’t sure why he couldn’t say it, but he felt a big part of it was this gut-wrenching feeling that he couldn’t find the root of for the life of him.

But Dream felt like he had to, or else George would take it the wrong way, so he parted his lips, the term resting on the tip of his tongue until George gently pressed his fingers over Dream’s mouth.

“Shh,” George giggled softly. “It’s okay if you don’t say it back yet,” He placed a kiss over his own knuckles, Dream felt the fleshy skin in the space of George’s fingers. “I just wanted you to know that *I* do.”



Amidst the steaming bathroom, George caught Dream’s reflected gaze in the mirror and Dream pretended to look away as if he *wasn’t* staring. When, in fact, he was. Because despite it having happened more than once, Dream knew he’d never get over the sight of George in his clothes.

Dream didn’t only like how big his shirts looked on George, but also how they started to smell like him—how pine and mint seeped through the fabric of his clothes and thrived in Dream’s soul whenever he’d catch the scent, whenever George wasn’t around.

Pushing down a knowing smile, George asked, “You staying the night?”

“You want me to?”

George turned around, leaning his back into the counter. “Yes, *please.*” He flashed a grin, drawing

out the syllables through pearly whites.

And for not being able to say “I love you” before, Dream fought the urge to in that instance.

“I need to host breakfast tomorrow, so I’ll have to leave early, but.” Dream smiled. “Yeah, I’ll stay the night.”

George walked over to him, standing on his tip-toes to tightly wrap his arms around Dream’s shoulders. “Good,”

There was a shift in the way George had been hugging him that day—though George held onto him tightly, almost always, this time felt different. George *felt* different in the space of his arms, Dream thought, so he, too, hugged him just as tight.

“Hate sleeping without you.”

Dream thought back to last night, the feeling validated in its mutuality. “So do I.” He breathed out into the curve of George’s neck, where his face almost felt squished with how *tight* George held him.

Dream wondered how he slept in his bed prior to having George in it. Prior to catching the whiff of his cologne, the coolness of George’s skin against his torso, the small weight of George’s head on his chest.

Dream could barely remember the absence of what was once his reality, and to be fully honest, *he didn’t want to*.



“Alright,” George breathed out after reciting a poem. “Who wrote that one?”

They had returned to the carpet after their shower. Dream lying on his side, propped up on his elbow while George sat opposite him, crisscrossed.

Staying in with George scoured up activities Dream had never thought possible, nor saw himself participating in. George was currently reading off excerpts from his three favoured authors and was testing Dream on his knowledge as if he had any when it came to novels. Or the arts in general.

But God, as out of character as this entire activity or any activity he participated in while being here, Dream wouldn’t trade it for the world. Because any time spent with George was time cherished. Then, Dream felt like he wasn’t exhausting himself—he wasn’t calculating the jabs of his sword or measuring his steps when hitting the punching bag.

Here, I’m free—you make me feel free.

“Uh,” Dream racked his brain for a shred of what he memorized from his mother’s jotted-down quotes. “Fuck, that’s...gotta be Kafka, right?”

“No—what?”

And Dream *lived* for these reactions—George being genuinely offended when Dream didn’t correctly guess the author.

Dream laughed. “Kafka sounds like he got up to some wild shit.”

George playfully rolled his eyes. “Not as much as Bukowski.”

Dream snapped his fingers and pointed at him. “Bukowski!”

George laughed—the surprised one, the one that echoed off the walls for a brief second and faltered around Dream’s heart. “I just *said* it, you idiot.” He couldn’t even manage the playful insult without a giggle, earning one from Dream in return. “Doesn’t count. You do *not* get a point.”

“Oh, sorry for not memorizing all the works of your favourite—*depressing*—authors—” Dream broke out into a laugh when George rolled his eyes halfway through his discourse, emulating a talking hand as Dream’s babbling. “—you’re annoying.”

“I’m...” George slowly tilted his head, eyes squinted. “...I’m sorry? I thought I just heard you say I’m annoying?”

Dream sat up, fixing his stare on him. “No need to apologize. You heard right—” George rose from his seat and wherever he was going to place his hands onto Dream failed as Dream caught them with his own, causing the two of them to thrash around on the carpet as they playfully wrestled.

Their chorused giggles and playful insults ceased from the knock at George’s door, pushing them to untangle their limbs.

“Expecting someone?” Dream cocked an eyebrow at him.

“Yeah,” George huffed, un-straddling Dream’s lap as he stood up. “You were starting to bore me.”

“Oh, that’s *my* bad.” Dream shot him an impish glare.

George flipped him off before getting the door, meeting Ana. “Oh, evening, Ana.”

“You’re chipper, aren’t you?” Ana grinned, head peeking past George’s shoulder to catch Dream. “And that would be why,” Dream offered a smile and a curt wave, to which she respectfully bowed her head before handing George an envelope.

When the door shut behind her, George’s back remained to Dream.

“What, George?” Dream beckoned after a few seconds passed.

George looked up at him. “It’s from The Nether.” He sniffled, skimming his index finger under his nose before striding towards Dream as he stood up from the ground.

Dream looked down at the envelope George nudged at him. “What?”

“You open it—”

Dream looked at him. “Why—”

“I’m too scared to.”

“What’s the worse that—”

“They could have denied our request for a fall-back.” George shot him a look, which Dream wholly returned before taking the envelope from him, pulling out the letter and reading over the words that he could’ve sworn lifted a good portion of the weight on his shoulders. “What?” George’s voice sounded distant from where Dream re-read over the response. “Dream—”

“They’re backing out.” Dream brainlessly mumbled before looking at George with a slow, growing

grin. “George, they’re backing out.”

George’s hand cradled the side of his face. “How long ‘till it gets to your father?”

Dream glimpsed down at the letter. “They said they’re gonna try to play it off, but Sebastian is gonna contact them eventually, so.” He wavered his gaze on George, noticing how he had his loose fists up against his lips in nervousness. “Are you okay?”

George caught his gaze. “Are you?” He dropped his hands.

With a tug at the corner of his lips, Dream said, “Asked you first.”

George lightly rolled his eyes before saying, “I mean...it’s happening, Dream.”

A silence settled within them.

George had never been to battle, for that Dream was *fucking* terrified, but the day was approaching—the day he was going to take his father on, the day he wasn’t going to leave that battlefield until his father was gone for good.

Until Queen Anthea and his mother were wholly avenged.

“Yeah.” Dream quietly said, gaze averted. “It is.”

“Are *you* alright?”

Dream briefly looked at him before returning to the letter which he fiddled with. “Yeah.”

“It’s okay if you’re not, you know? Don’t get me wrong, I want nothing more than to abolish him, but,” George sniffled. “he *is* your father, Dream.”

Dream drew in his bottom lip, gnawing at the words that George left in his space—and he felt stupid to even consider it for a second because, “I was gonna say I’d miss the good memories I had with him, but come to think of it?” He glimpsed at George who kept his eyes fixed on him. “I don’t think I have any.” George reached for Dream’s hand, interlacing their fingers. “He owes me my whole life, George. The only way to get that back is by taking his.”



Having to look into Dream’s eyes and pretending to be sober was *killing* him.

The only thing he was thankful for was that being high had him so goddamn dehydrated and that made drinking glasses upon glasses of water easy, giving him the perfect excuse to escape to the bathroom to do more lines because George would not survive this lying thing if he were sober.

And when his high died down when they climbed in bed that night, George was royally fucked. Because Dream had him caged in his arms. Usually, this warmth wrapped George whole, but he felt suffocated because all he wanted was to get high and he couldn’t do that with Dream next to him, nor could he leave without waking him up.

George could feel himself growing antsy, could feel his skin and fingers *itching* for what his body re-accustomed himself to in the last twenty-four hours. He’d fought this off before, he’d *been* fighting this off for the days that he has been sober, but at that moment, *knowing* that he had drugs on him, so close within his grasp was *killing* him.

“George,” Dream mumbled.

A sick part of George *hoped* that he was awake, causing him to glance over his shoulder to hopefully catch a glimpse of Dream, but to no avail.

So looking back ahead to the wall he's been burning holes into, George whispered, "You awake?"

No answer.

George's eyes fluttered shut. *Fuck's sake.*

Dream nestled his forehead into the curve of George's neck, lightly pulling George's back against his chest. George hated that he wasn't enjoying this because, for someone who *wanted* Dream to stay the night, he couldn't think of anything worse than having him here right now. And he hated that a thought as such could live in his head amidst a moment a huge part of him knew he wouldn't give for the world.

What made it worse was when Dream sleepily slurred, "I love you."



Dream usually slept through the whole night unless woken and when he rose with the dark Salacian sky, the absence of George in his arms answered his confusion.

"George?"

"I'm here."

The room was barely moonlit, making it hard for Dream to spot George until he caught the top of his head at the edge of the bed. He stepped out and turned the corner to find him sitting on the floor, back pressed against the footrest with his knees to his chest.

It wasn't until he sat down next to George that Dream sensed it.

This was where the perplexity towards George's demeanour came full circle. In the sleepless eyes and hollowed cheeks, the small trembles of his shoulders and the shakiness of his hands which he tried to clutch around his knees.

Dream had witnessed the highs. George looked at him, a tear-filled gaze, effacing any bright traces of their morning and afternoon in his faded complexion. *And now, Dream was witnessing the lows.*

"Time to talk about it, huh?" Dream asked, watching George's shoulders fall with his exhale.

They'd both known it. Dream studied him carefully. From the moment he pointed out that George was "talking a lot more." From the moment Dream stepped into the room, they had *both* been avoiding the severity behind George's radio silence that lasted 48 hours before the "I love you" sounded terribly disheartening, not in meaning or weight, but in deliverance.

"I don't want to." George shook his head.

Their voices were quiet as the room, as the night.

"We have to."

I don't want to either, Dream thought as he continued to drown in the fear corroding George's teary eyes, *I'm scared, too.*

"I'm not doing this to you, too, Dream."

"Too?"

"Don't want you to hear what my friends and family have been hearing for years." George shakily breathed out. "Don't make me talk about it."

Meaning you can, but you don't want to?

"We can't just ignore it, George." Dream lightly shook his head.

George tilted his head to the side, a teardrop slipping down his cheek. "Please."

This back and forth could go on for hours, Dream thought. And this back and forth had been going for the entire time they'd known each other.

"George,"

George huffed, getting up from the ground. "Don't—"

"Why do I feel like you regret saying that you love me?" Dream stood up, faced with George's back.

George barely moved towards the piano before Dream watched the nervous inclinations driving a dainty hand to a pale neck and a shaky hand at his waist.

"I don't regret it."

"You're not happy about it either."

George's shoulders dropped with a sigh. "I'm not."

Dream swallowed the admittance with difficulty. "Why?"

"Because you scare me." George quietly said.

Dream's brows knitted as he repeated, "I scare you."

"And I love it," George turned around to face him, glazed over brown eyes with tears; a sight Dream's heart was still adjusting to. "And I love you," Adjusting to hearing *that*, Dream let out a small breath. "I love you and it's *killing* me, Dream."

"George, I—" Dream bit his words back. *Think, don't rush.* "—I'm...I need you to make this easier for me to understand."

"It's going to kill you." George deadpanned. "I'm going to kill you."

Dream shook his head. "What are you saying?"

The thing about speaking out of impulse, for Dream, rooted back to his father. Sebastian's words were treading too close to what George was saying and Dream was quick to deny it because he didn't *want* Sebastian to be right—*Sebastian isn't right.*

"I am so fucking broken, Dream. I have so much going on in my head. All the time. The only way I was able to manage was being constantly fucked out of my mind and now I can't even do that." Through a rivulet of words, George remained soft-spoken; strenuously speaking, but still quiet—

and it shattered Dream having to witness how defeated he look. “It’s *fucking draining*. I am so tired of having to find a purpose in this life when there’s never been one. And it’s killing me having to do this sober.” He ran shaky fingers through his hair, clutching it at the top as he averted his gaze. “And it’s killing me having to do this to you because I love you. And I can...I can bear seeing the disappointment and hurt on my friend’s faces, on my dad’s—I’m used to it—but not you, okay? I don’t wanna get used to doing that to you. I thought your touch could suffice. I thought it would be enough to pull me out of it and it was. Fuck, it was. But—” He held his words with the sharp breath he took. “—like every other high I’ve experienced, it fled me. And that is *not* your fault. Please do *not* take it as your fault.” He covered his face with trembling hands, every sigh was more exasperated than the next. “It’s not your fault, it’s mine because I am an addict, Dream.”

Dream’s eyes fluttered shut. Not because of what George was saying, not really—but because he was slowly inching into the validation of Sebastian’s statement. *And he can’t fucking stand it.*

George dropped his hands, “I am an addict, through and through, and that means that I will *always* be chasing a greater high...until I’m no...longer here...to...” His eyes skimmed the ground before hesitantly meeting Dream’s gaze.

Dream looked at him and he couldn’t even be stunned. Not after the repetition of George’s messily handwritten, “*I want to disappear.*”

“I don’t want to put that on you because I love you. You are so wonderful—” George sniffled, brushing his index finger under his nose. “You’re, like...”

Dream didn’t realize tears welled his eyes until a drop treaded down his cheek, causing him to blink up at the ceiling before resting his gaze back on George.

“Dream, you’re like the sunlight.” George’s voice cracked through a whisper. “And I am this darkness that just *constantly* shades over it.” He slicked the tears that smeared his lips. “I love you and I can’t let you go—I don’t *want* to.”

“Then don’t—”

“But I need to, okay?” George nodded and Dream immediately shook his head. “You have to let me let you go.”

“No—”

“Yes—”

“No, George.”

“Fuck, Dream. Don’t do this.”

“No, look at me,” Dream gently cupped his face, George tore his gaze from him. “I am *not* disregarding the pain that loving me causes you, but you’re not going to feel any better letting me go, George. It’s gonna hurt either way, but look me in the eyes and tell me that letting go of each other wouldn’t hurt more.”

Dream gave him the option to contest. Because maybe he could be wrong. Maybe George didn’t want this as much, maybe knowing that he loved Dream wasn’t enough to hold him down, maybe the complications of his own mind had more power.

But George didn’t contest. Nor did he agree. But his silence was enough to determine his uncertainty of *needing* to let go.

“What you’re asking of me right now, is to give up. On you.” George’s lips quivered, looking at Dream through fluttering glossy eyes. “And when I asked *you* to let me in, I was *all* in, George. I *am* all in. You want me to give up because that’s the easy way out—because then that would mean that you are what you say you are—what you *think* you are.” His thumb swiped the tears from George’s cheeks. “But I’m not someone that gives up and neither are you.” And looking into his eyes, his father’s words re-circling his head to assist George’s self-deprecation, Dream sternly said, “You’re not this helpless cause. You’re not as weak as you think you are. You’re not as powerless in this addiction as you think you are.” George tried to shake his head, but Dream kept it firm in the space of his hands. “You can get out of this. You *are* getting out of it.”

“That’s what you want to believe.” George choked out. “That lie is your comfort for what you thought I was gonna do that night.”

Dream furrowed his eyebrows. “What?”

“The way you looked at me...when I told you I didn’t take them...” George’s fluttered shut, tears rageful in their course, his tone sedated through a defeated whisper. “...you didn’t believe me, Dream.”

“George—”

“You didn’t believe me—”

“That’s not—”

“You didn’t believe—”

“Shh, shh, hey,” Dream pulled George into his arms, his sobs muffled against the fabric of Dream’s shirt. “That’s not...that’s not why.”

Fuck.

Dream was to open a memory he had kept repressed for years, or thought he had, but it had definitely surfaced at the moment where he most definitely did not believe George.

“I’m not blaming you...” George’s voice was warm in contradiction with how cold his tears felt through the fabric of Dream’s shirt. “...I’m not blaming you at all.”

Dream reeled a breath as he glimpsed up at the ceiling. *Here we go.* He sighed out, “I didn’t believe you because I was projecting what happened with my mom onto you.” George’s grip on his shirt loosened as he slowly pulled away to look up at Dream. “She used—um—she was...unstable. She had a condition. Went through...high-highs and low-lows. Sometimes, she’d...go through these phases where she wanted to revamp herself. So, she’d pull me out of bed at night and drag me to the bathroom where she made me watch her flush down her drugs.” He swallowed, his throat pricked by needles. “Long story short, she, uh...did that knowing that she had more hidden somewhere, so.”

George slowly diverted his gaze, lips parted for a sentiment Dream couldn’t place. “...Fuck.” He whispered.

“That’s not the point.” Dream sighed. “The point is that I projected that onto you when it was not at all what I thought of you. You’re not her and she’s not you, George.”

Because as much as Sebastian liked to think so, George wasn’t going to relapse.

Dream still couldn't place the emotion he wore, so he continued, "What you did, that night?" He leaned in, speaking the words so as to cement it into George's head. "George, what you did that night was *big*." George inhaled sharply, directing his eyes to the ground. "You washed them down the drain knowing that Karl wouldn't give you more. *You* did that. I didn't have to tell you to. No one did. It was *all you* ." He held George's face, searching for his eyes which he received, though it felt like he wasn't entirely there. "I know...you hate hearing this sort of stuff, but, fuck, George, I —" He broke into a small smile. "—I am *so fucking proud* of you."

George's tears returned as he was quick to dismiss. "Don't say that—"

"I am." George dropped his head against Dream's chest, his hands clutching the back of Dream's shirt with a tearful grip. "You're doing great, George. And I'm proud of you."



Morning came and Dream was hesitant to leave George. Pressing a feather-light kiss onto his hair before brushing some strands away from his shut eyes.

Dream knew he didn't have to worry about George relapsing because he'd be cooped up inside the palace with Quackity and Cole, maybe even Karl. Still, reluctant was his travel back to Vulcan and his mind was barely present in most of the conversations he held with the warriors at breakfast.

All Dream could think about was returning to George.

Dream walked down the hallways of the palace to head to the foyer. Dylan and a few other warriors bid him goodbye and purposefully brought up George to tease him as they recently started doing. Dream made sure to playfully flip them off as he always did in exchange.

Before he could reach the door, Dream was harshly bumped into by Punz with a sharp jut of his shoulder into Dream's.

"Watch where you're going." Dream muttered, barely acknowledging him as he continued towards the door.

"No need to rush. Your boyfriend has no concept of time," Punz scoffed as they passed each other, "Brain's probably all fried from the drugs."

Dream stopped in his tracks. "What did you say?" Turning around on his heel, he watched Punz continue down the hall. "Yo. Get your ass back here." Punz turned around and faced him. "Don't say that kind of shit again, you understand?"

"*Fuck you* is what I understand—"

"The hell is up with you, dude?"

"The reason you're getting so defensive is 'cause you know I'm right, big bro," Punz smirked.

Dream reeled a breath. "While I've got you here, let me ask you something—why the hell are you buying drugs from Prince Karl?"

Punz chuckled to himself. "I was hoping he'd tell you." Dream's brows knitted. "And I'm surprised you haven't put two and two together, yet. Or you'd be *pissed* right now." He chuckled.

"What?"

“So much for being dad’s prodigy, huh?”

From last night’s events and the rough start to this morning, Dream was growing exasperated having to prolong this conversation he didn’t even mean to have.

Lightly throwing a hand up, “Alright, you know what?” Dream huffed out, “Do whatever the fuck you want, Punz. I’m off.”

“Yeah, no, of course—go tend to your drug-addled boyfriend instead of staying here with your family.”

Dream squeezed his eyes shut, took a deep breath that didn’t help sustain his temper as he found himself turning on his heel, striding towards Punz who barely had the time to react before Dream had him shoved against the wall. “What the *fuck* is your problem?”

Punz looked down at him through a lidded gaze. “He’s doing this to you, you know? Making you lose your shit like this? You used to be good at holding down your temper—” Dream scoffed, letting go of him, looking away from his gaze. “—this is what mom used to do to you, too.”

Dream shot him a glare. “Don’t talk about shit you don’t understand, Punz.”

“Oh, no, I understand.” Punz shoved Dream back. “I understand that you’re mentally weakened by the mentally unstable, I understand that you lose yourself trying to help those who never asked for it, and I understand that the person who’s gonna be in charge of my *only* home,” He shoved a finger into Dream’s chest, “is a *pussy* that’s fallen in love with the catalyst to his own downfall.”

“Stop talking—”

“Or what?” Punz’s smirk grew, eyes reeling over Dream’s hardened features. “You gonna kill me like how you’re planning to kill dad?”

Dream felt like the world went quiet for a second and not in the serene sense that felt promising, not the quiet offered by his anchor. This was the calmness before the rupture. And that’s the only shred of quiet that lived in this palace, lived within his family, his brother—who stared back at him, with a knowing glare, a tantalizing stare.

Dream could barely hear himself speak as he said, “What the hell are you talking about?”

“I overheard you and King George talking about your little plan to kill our *father*—”

“Punz, listen to me—”

“No, you listen to *me*,” Punz took a step towards Dream. “you’re not touching a single hair on dad’s head, you hear me?”

Dream was panicking, rightfully so. Because they were getting *so* close. He was getting so close to obtaining the crown, he could feel his freedom at the tip of his fingers.

“Luke,” Dream took a small breath. “You don’t know what you’re getting into, okay? So—”

“I don’t care to know—”

“There are *things* that don’t *concern* you, Luke—this is one of those—”

“You’re *not* going against dad—”

“Stay *out* of it.”

“I’m going to tell him—” And though he didn’t mean right now, when Punz tried to move past him, Dream gripped his arm so hard, it derived a sharp breath from Punz. “Let go of me—”

“Don’t get involved, Luke. This is some *serious* shit—”

“What’s serious is the fact that you’re picking King George over *family*. This is our *father*.”

“This isn’t *just* about George.” Dream growled, shoving the grip he had on Punz’s arm, sending him back against the wall. “This is about what dad did to mom.”

Punz’s breath grew ragged with the tightening grip Dream had on his arm. “He did us a favour. Did *you* a favour, you ungrateful bastard—”

“I don’t *care*, Punz. He *needs* to go.”

“Mom needed to go.” Punz deadpanned.

Dream shook his head. “Stop—”

“You couldn’t see it, but she was never happy here. Whatever dad did, it was for her own good.”

“You sound fucking brainwashed—”

“You sound delusional.”

“He *killed* her, Luke. That was someone he *married*—someone he had children with—that’s *our* *mom*.”

“She was never a mother, Clay.” Punz’s tears glossed over his eyes. “She didn’t have the heart to love, not when all she could think about was getting drunk or high.”

“She loved me.”

A tear slipped down Punz’s face, features rigid like he didn’t want to accept that this was hurting him, too. “Well, then, I’m sorry for your loss.” He snatched his arm out of his grasp, moving past him.

Dream was point-blank defeated, but he couldn’t back down, couldn’t let Punz crumble the plan he and George’s friends concocted. “Don’t fucking tell him, Luke—”

Punz whirled around. “I’m giving you a chance to tell him yourself. But if you don’t?” He narrowed his glare on Dream. “*I* will tell him and it will do a *hell* of a lot more damage.”

“I’m *begging* you to stay out of it.”

“Stay out of what?”

Dream’s heart nearly stopped at the sound of Sebastian’s echoing footsteps in the foyer as he approached them.

Back to his father, Punz narrowed his eyes on Dream, Dream was on his knees silently begging through their shared stare.

And as if Dream hadn’t been taking enough hits as it was, Punz looked him dead in the eyes and

said, “His boyfriend relapsed.” He leaned in, “And to answer your question,” and tauntingly whispered, “that’s why I bought the drugs.”

Dream was too shocked to fight the statement, too stunned to ask more questions as there were so many unanswered things brimming his head.

“Oh, you told him.”

And Dream could’ve sworn his entire being set aflame from the *sheer fucking* apathy in his father’s tone.

“I just wanted to test your theory, Clay.” Sebastian must’ve caught Dream’s distant gaze, veered to the floor—wholly prisoned in his head.

The way George acted yesterday: the brightness—artificial light, completely bypassing Dream at the time.

“Turns out you were wrong, of course,”

The sniffles, the bathroom breaks,

“But you can’t say I didn’t warn you.”

The burst of energy, the play fights,

“Once an addict,” He shrugged and lightly threw his hands up. “always an addict.”

You were high the entire time.

“Oh, don’t act surprised, Clay. Yes, it’s a shame, but also *completely* expected.”

Before his brain could even catch up to his movements, Dream was making a beeline for Sebastian, but Punz held him back with force.

Thrashing around to escape Punz’s hold, Dream’s voice boomed against the wall, each word sounding from his deteriorating core the longer he stared at the indifference in his father’s gaze. “You did this to him. He was doing *well*. He was *sober*. *You fucked* it up for him. *You* triggered him—*fuck you*. ”

“*Calm down*, dude,” Punz spoke through gritted teeth.

“You did this to him.” Dream’s voice shot into a whisper, insuppressible tears coursing down his cheeks. “He was good...he was okay...” He trailed off, staring back at his father through a blurry gaze, his attempt in getting out of Punz’s hold slowly declined with his defeat. “...he was fine.”

“He was never fine. This is who he was from the start and who he’ll always be.” Sebastian’s expression held no taunt, voice free of its menacing tone. “This is the part where you accept that.”

Dream’s breath oscillated between his parted lips, too tired to showcase disbelief.

A taut silence settled, straining the tension.

“I’ll accept it,” Dream’s gaze was empty as he freed himself from Punz’s hold which had loosened around him. Moving past Punz, who stayed close behind, Dream walked towards his father and stopped in front of him. “But nothing changes—”

“Clay—”

Dream held up a hand to cease Punz’s word, keeping his glare fixed on his father. “Regardless of *how* and *where* it happens,” He looked straight into Sebastian’s eyes. “I cannot *wait* until the day you *die*.” He took one more step. “And I hope it’s *slow* and *miserable*, and I hope you feel *all* of that pain for eternity.”



Crying wasn’t an option this morning and George felt like that was the worst kind of comedown. Hours waiting on Dream felt like years and he was driving himself insane fighting the urge to finish the half portion that remained in the baggie.

So, he didn’t fight it.

He did a few more lines and he feared for the moment where he’d run out. He figured if he did all of it right now, maybe it would take him out for good and the thought alone—the way that *didn’t* initially scare him—crept up when Dream’s word returned to circle his head: the same four words that pushed him to do more lines.

“I’m proud of you.” taunted him constantly; dragged him by his neck through every second spent around Dream, stopping him from peacefully enjoying Dream’s company and *it was all his fault*.

George sniffled, pocketing the baggie before he caught his reflection in the mirror. *He has no idea how much of a mess you are and you let him look you dead in the eyes to say that he was proud of you. And once he finds out, you’ll have broke—*

“Fuck. Stop.” George ran a hand through his hair, turned away from his reflection and walked back to his room.

And if he could see himself, if he could witness the way he was *tweaking*, George would be point-blank disgusted.

But that’s the thing he loved most about drugs—he stopped dead in his tracks when the substance hit, igniting his nerves and wrapping his core whole—the inability to perceive reality, ignorant to the awaiting trainwreck.

““Sup, dumbass?””

George nearly yelped when he caught sight of Quackity, who twirled a dagger in between his fingers. “Get out of my room, will you?”

“I think I liked you better when you weren’t talking—head’s up!” Quackity launched the dagger at the bookshelf, the blade wedging itself in the wood.

George straightened his shoulders after having ducked, shooting Quackity a glare before saying, “*Out.*”

“Nah, c’mon.” Quackity chuckled. “Let me stay for a bit. No more blade-throwing, I promise.”

In all honesty, George *could* use the company, so he let Quackity linger around for a bit before deciding to bring the letter up. Because God knows he wouldn’t be mentally stable to handle doing it during his comedown.

He recapitulated the letter, as he did for Karl. Quackity made a point of saying that he was the first

one to question Sebastian—George let him have it.

“One more thing.” George pulled out the rings he grabbed while Quackity was reading the letter. “Give me your hand.” He was reluctant but abided; his eyes following the ring that George fitted on Quackity’s forefinger. “There,” George smiled down at him before flashing his matching ring. “We match.”

Quackity never looked up from where he sat at the edge of the bed.

“Smelted from her necklace.” George lingered in front of him, voice quieting down when he noticed that Quackity went dead silent. “Dream...did it...” He trailed off, even quieter. “...Q?”

Quackity looked up and the tears in his eyes instantaneously stole a breath from George because he *could not*, for the life of him, remember the last time he saw Quackity cry.

“She called me her son.”

George’s lips tugged up, eyes welling with tears as he nodded. “Of course.” Quackity choked out a chuckle before covering his face with his hands. “Q...” George laughed lightly, crouching down to level himself with Quackity before enveloping him into an embrace.

“Fuck. I’m sorry.” Quackity’s voice muffled itself in his hands.

George’s brows knitted as he chuckled. “What for?”

“I fucking hate crying, man.” Quackity sniffled.

George laughed, pulling away from him, but keeping his hands on Quackity’s shoulders. “You alright?” He cradled Quackity’s tear-stained cheeks.

“Thank you, George.” George tilted his head to the side, sporting a wavering smile. “For being a big brother to me.” He chuckled through a shaky breath.

George’s heart felt like it could combust from warmth as he brushed the pad of his thumb over Quackity’s cheekbone. “Don’t have to thank me for that, little brother.” He giggled, springing back up slightly to pull him into a tight hold. “We’ll always have each other, okay? I promise.”

It was a promise he shouldn’t have made, but with the addition of the drugs making his brain more pliant, George wasn’t able to stop the words from naturally spilling out. Because it was a promise he *wanted* to keep but wasn’t sure he could.

Quackity clutched the fabric of George’s sweater. “I was scared when you went quiet for those two days. I thought maybe being sober was taking a bigger toll on you than expected,” It was then that this sweet moment turned bitter in George’s head when in reality, Quackity meant no wrong. “But you’ve been good. These past few days, I thought you’d be acting different, that you’d *be* different,” He sniffled, tightening his grip around the fabric. “But you’re just the same old George.”

Something triggered within George, then.

And when they pulled away, George stared back at Quackity with a smile he fought to keep up with the boy’s last statement, one George internalized—what Quackity thought was for the best, what George took for the worst.

“Always remember, my Dream, that love—real love...”

Violette’s voice that night stitched every spoken word into Dream’s head as he rushed to Salacia, to George.

“...real love should have your soul screaming at the top of its lungs as it drowns itself in all and every emotion known to mankind.”

Dream barely acknowledged anyone he crossed paths with in the foyer of the Salacia palace. Running up the stairs, striding down the hall, and swinging George’s door open. His mind was *barely* at ease when he saw George sitting at his piano—much more different than when he walked in yesterday morning.

No, this time, George was hunched over: an idle arm slung on the piano shelf, his side digging into the edge of the keyboard, and his dainty hand lifeless over the keys—*unmoving*.

Dream approached lightly, keeping his eyes fixed on George who kept his gaze on the ivory bones. George’s eyelids were heavy with the weight of drugs, his entire body lax.

Dream sat down next to him slowly. A breath was silently jerked from when George’s eyes rolled up to catch Dream’s.

“Dream...” George slurred through a defeated whisper, barely having the energy to lift his hand from the keys, causing it to slip down where it dropped onto Dream’s lap; Dream, who trembled where he sat, looked at him through a blurred gaze. George slowly swallowed, barely moving his upper body from the piano, causing him to slip and falter into Dream’s lap. George’s hands felt for Dream’s leg, his head nestled against Dream’s thigh. Through an almost childish-like, regressed voice, George whimpered, “...I’m sorry.”

Dream wanted to break as he susurrated, unable to keep his tears from flowing out, leaning down and wrapping an arm around George’s fragile body. *It’s not your fault*, he wanted to say. *Because if you hadn’t been exposed, you wouldn’t have relapsed.*

George spoke through slow intervals, each syllable slurred out. “I’m sorry...”

It’s not your fault.

“I wanted to be good,”

You were good.

“But it was so loud, Dream.”

They did this to you.

“It was hurting everywhere.”

Dream kissed his shoulder, despite knowing that George wouldn’t feel it—because at this point, Dream was no longer comforting George—George was amidst his comfort, *had* been amidst his comfort—but Dream’s comfort was sinking in his arms. Dream’s comfort had a soul and it was withering away with alchemized substances. Dream’s comfort was a drug addict.

“I can’t change,” Dream winced, shielding his teary eyes in George’s hair. “And I’m so...so sorry, Dream.”

Chapter End Notes

thank you for the nice as per usual. treat yourselves good x (:

Beautiful Crime

Chapter Summary

George makes an end for a beginning.

Chapter Notes

i turned 22 today, so here's chapter 22 in the month of 02/22
& sorry in advance for the angst. just hang in there for a little bit more. x (;

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The history of melancholia includes all of us.

Like two lovers—as a pair and as individuals—united by tenderness.



Dream felt like he should've known better.

He felt like an idiot for not questioning George's demeanour. Not enough to have done something about it, to have addressed it. Because even after hearing George's discourse; everything that had been going on inside George's head, prior to the vow of silence and after the deceitful "I love you", Dream *let* him act as if none of that had happened. Allowed George to lure him into distracting activities, no matter how futile or brainless—without questioning *enough*.

Then it became too late.

Because now Dream carried him to bed, where he watched George sleep because he felt like he couldn't bat an eyelid—in case someone tried to sabotage him again. *Because you were good until they got involved*. Dream mindlessly brushed a loose strand of hair from George's forehead. *You were good*.

But you're fragile. Ever since that morning following George's drug-addled mania in Violette's study, ever since Metanoia, ever since reading Anthea's letter—*something has unopened you and you are fragile—unlike the first day we spoke, when the drugs shaped the apathy in your countenance, the impassiveness in your tone*.

George woke up sometime during the evening, locking eyes with Dream and immediately breaking down in tears. His pain was silent, as was Dream's; both their souls shattering for having hurt the other.

Dream held George while he cried. Didn't say a word. Didn't tell George that he wasn't mad, didn't assure George of anything. Because George didn't want to hear any of that, it was clear in the way he trembled in Dream's arms.

George was just, well, defeated.



“I can’t stay here.”

Dream hadn’t slept once since he and George got in bed. He made sure to sit up against the headboard with George soundlessly asleep in his arms so as to not fall asleep—he couldn’t allow himself. Because the last time he wasn’t *around* was when he lost a piece of George he feared he wouldn’t see for a while.

Dream dipped his head down, speaking against George’s forehead; peppered with cold sweats of withdrawal. “Where do you wanna go?”

“Anywhere. I need to move. Please—”

“Karl’s?”

George shook his head instantaneously. “Yours.”

“George...” Dream was hesitant to bring George back to the spot where his decline began. “...I don’t think it’s safe—”

“I’ll be safe with you.” George nestled his head against Dream’s chest. “Please.”



The walk back to Vulcan was wordless: George was tucked underneath Dream’s arm. Dream gently ushered him past the doors of Salacia as they tried to go unnoticed.

They remained on Dream’s bed for the rest of the afternoon, just as they had been in George’s room. George slipped back into slumber, Dream hoped, as he fought to keep his eyes open—on guard now more than ever since walking past the Vulcan palace doors.

But he was instantly alarmed when shaken out of sleep, with a firm grip on his arm jolting him awake. Dream immediately glanced down to see if George was still within his hold and only then was he able to simmer down, pulling George further against his chest, one protective hand on George’s head as he sent a glare to the intruder who he discerned as Sapnap.

“Holy shit, Sap—”

“Sorry, dude.” Sapnap chuckled nervously. “Tried calling your name but you were out cold.” Dream’s heart was still racing on the fact that he let himself sleep when he *shouldn’t* had. “Why are you holding him like a mama bear would her cub?” He teased.

Dream appreciated the effort, but couldn’t muster a laugh if he tried. “Thought you were Punz or Sebastian.”

“Nah, but...Punz *was* looking for you earlier. Told him you were probably with King George, which...” Sapnap narrowed his gaze on George, secured in Dream’s hold. “...did I...am I missing something, or?”

Dream knew he had to update Sapnap on the situation, but it still took a few tries from Sapnap to get Dream out of bed and away from his protective hold on George. He only agreed to leave George if they remained just outside of his bedroom; where Dream sat with his back pressed

against the door, Sapnap sat opposite him, back against a vacant wall, their legs extended between the two of them.

Dream recounted everything from his talk with Punz, to Sebastian, and George's relapse, whirling all the horrors and shock from Sapnap as he stared back wordlessly.

"God," Sapnap scoffed, shaking his head. "Punz is such a fucking idiot, you know that?"

Dream's brows lightly shot up with concurrence. "Yeah. I *do* know."

Sapnap's jaw shifted as the aftertaste of Dream's speech rested acridly on his tongue. "I'm sorry."

The sole of Dream's boot scraped back against the floorboards as he brought a knee to his chest. "What? Why?"

Sapnap glanced up from the ground. "'Cause. You didn't get to choose your family. Got stuck with your dad and Punz."

The corner of Dream's lips twitched up as he slung his arm over his knee. "I mean," He shrugged lightly. "I got you in the end, didn't I?"

"You have me, bro." Sapnap's brows furrowed with determination. "Always."

Dream's smile grew as he stared back into Sapnap's zealous gaze. *I know I do, idiot.* "Till death do us apart."

Sapnap snorted. "You're spending too much time with King George," Dream chuckled, brows drawing together with slight confusion. "That's poetic talk."

Dream playfully rolled his eyes to the side where he brainlessly kept his gaze for a moment. "I really do have you, don't I?" He mumbled to himself, and though he hadn't meant to voice it out, he caught Sapnap's affirmative nod, as he'd always be ready to assure it—with his whole being. "You know, I've been thinking about my father lately—no, like," He saw the immediate confusion laced with disgust in Sapnap's expression, causing him to urgently add, "Like because of everything—I've just been thinking about the major points in my life...childhood, I guess, where he...sort of..."

Dream knew the word, but it dallied on his tongue. For years of having to repress the hurt felt through that month of consecutive training. The very repressed hurt that had him lying to George that one night under the Terran moon—*a hundred hours already seemed to alarm you, imagine if you knew the truth.*

"Fucked you up..." Sapnap offered. "...mentally—traumatized you?"

Dream waved him off. "Relax—"

"No, it's the truth." Sapnap frowned. "I was there when you suffered those night terrors, bro. Shit didn't come out of the blue."

Dream shot him an impish look before saying, "I know you were there. That's my point," He began. "Sebastian had me locked out on the field and you and my mom took it in turns to sneak me back in at night so I could sleep on an actual bed instead of the grass," He watched Sapnap shift uncomfortably, bringing his knees up before he wrapped his arms around them. "Or how...you'd come practice with me when you knew Sebastian wasn't around to scold you for doing so." Dream's smile progressed with the memory and its attached sentiment. "You've always been by

my side—thank you...Nick.”

Sapnap shrugged it off, but Dream could tell he didn’t want to dwell on the gratitude too much—wearing his heart on his sleeve, but always keeping it tucked under for the practiced sheathing of his vulnerability.

“It’s half of what you did for me,” Sapnap muttered, clearing his throat as he averted his gaze; Dream suppressed his grin as he pointed it to the ground. “You know I’ll never forget that practice?” Dream glanced over at him. “You know the one.” Dream’s puzzlement slowly grew into his eyebrows. “When I used your own tactic against you.”

It took a few moments for Dream to dig back into the memories he kept locked away, along with all the things that shaped him—shaped his emotional resilience.

Dream’s smile was light on the account of the bittersweet recall. “Playing dead,”

“So you can attack when your enemy least expects it.” Sapnap indolently pointed a finger at him.

Dream chuckled lightly. “It’s not a bad strat, you know?”

Sapnap jutted his bottom lip out. “Nah. Isn’t. I mean...it had you bursting into tears, thinking you actually hurt me.” *That’s* the part of that day that Dream suppressed, having him search for the memory with difficulty. “That’s why I don’t think I’ll ever forget that day,” Sapnap quietly said. “I didn’t realize how much consecutive training was fucking you up until I had to hold you for... ‘till you calmed down.”

Dream placed his forehead against the balls of his palm, wincing. “Fuck. I’m sorry, Sap.”

“The fuck?” Sapnap playfully kicked the sole of his shoe against Dream’s. “Don’t apologize for that shit.”

“No, like,” Dream dropped his hand back to where it hung off over his knee. “I’m sorry, *too*.” Sapnap looked at him, rightfully lost. “For the fact that you got tangled up in *my* family.”

Sapnap wavered his gaze on him for a brief second before breaking into a grin. “Got you out of it, didn’t I?”

Dream sighed, sinking the back of his head against the door. “Got a shitty father figure out of it too, though.”

Sapnap puffed. “I never saw that moron as a paternal figure, ‘cause I never needed one. I needed guidance, a mentor—that was you.” He nudged Dream’s foot again, deriving a smile from Dream. “You’re the only person I looked up to—listened to. Sebastian had no effect on my life.”

Dream giggled before it faltered with the fond look on both his and Sapnap’s countenance. “Good.” He noiselessly said through a sigh. “That’s good.”

“You were a born leader, you know?” Sapnap began, way too soon for Dream to have already come down from the overzealousness of the previous compliment. “Knew that from the first day we met—”

Dream covered his face with his hand. “Stop, Sap—”

“Dream,” Sapnap beckoned and Dream’s hand slowly slid off to cover his mouth. “Whatever happens, no matter how fucked the plan could possibly be now,” That foreboding truth returned to

sit heavily on Dream's chest. "Whatever happens, that crown belongs to you, bro." He peered into Dream's eyes. "Not Punz. Not even Sebastian." He sat up, leaned forward and wrapped a firm hand around Dream's ankle. "You."

Dream went to say something but they both looked over when they noticed Dylan in their peripheral, walking over to them.

Returning his gaze to Sapnap, Dream said, "All this time spent fighting for it and I don't even know if I could handle—"

"Bullshit. You were always meant for this—"

"What are we talking about, boys?" Dylan crouched down to level with the pair.

Sapnap smirked. "Clay doesn't think he'd own the crown—"

Dream rolled his eyes. "Okay, I didn't say—"

"Yeah, you would." Dylan scoffed. "We all know it." He admitted as if it were the easiest thing.

And knowing that the Vulcan warriors always had his back, Dream never expected them to think that he was more deserving of the crown than Sebastian—their respective king.

Sapnap looked at Dream with a smug grin. "We've spoken about it before." He wiggled his fingers at Dream. "Behind your back."

"True," Dylan drawled out the syllables through a giggle, humouring Sapnap's impishness.

"What are you here for, Dylan?" Dream chuckled.

"Oh, right." Dylan clapped his hand before springing back up. "King Sebastian wants to see you. Well, all of us, but."

Dream met Sapnap's gaze in an instant and the fear that resided in their range had Dream's heart churning itself in his chest.

"Uh..." Dream slowly tore his eyes from Sapnap to look up at Dylan. "...did he say what for?"

Dylan extended a hand at Dream, which Dream hesitantly took on the account of the growing panic. "No, but," He pulled Dream up to his feet. "Punz gathered all of us and then told me to come get you, so it's either got to do with *him* or both—who knows? I certainly don't, but I can't find out without you two being there, so let's move."

As much as Dream was *expected* to move, his legs felt bolted to the ground, paralyzed with fear for the possibility that Punz had revealed the truth to Sebastian.



George had been awake.

Sure, he was slipping in and out of consciousness ever since draining the whole packet of crushed crystals, but in times where Dream thought he was asleep, George was awake.

George felt powerless with his back pressed against Dream's door where he could hear Dream's and Sapnap's muffled conversation. His heart was bent, chewed and spat out of his chest by the end of it.

Punz knew the whole truth because George couldn't keep his mouth shut, thinking he was doing something when he tried to con Sebastian.

Sebastian checked in with The Nether earlier than expected and now their sole advantage, their sole leverage was out the window—exonerating the plan in successfully executing him.

But what really broke George was when Dream admitted to having purposely kept the truth from him due to his relapse.

“He’s fragile.”

“I don’t want to put any more pressure on him.”

All because you don’t think I can handle it.

And George wasn't angry with Dream. George was disappointed in himself. Remorse was eating him alive; slowly, painstakingly. And he was point-blank defeated. Too defeated to *show* any sign of remorse when he didn't think twice about waiting on Sapnap, Dream and Dylan to vacate the halls so he could leave.

His brain hadn't even digested what that possible meeting could be—in fact, *I don’t want to know because knowing will probably hurt more.*

George kept being assured from the moment he relapsed that he was—is —too weak to handle the pressure of a battle, of the kingship.

And that realization paired with the never-ending self-deprecation accompanied by the soul-eating remorse brought him to the end of the Vulcan staircase, where he exited the palace as stealthily as he could.

No note was left behind for Dream, this time. George didn't want Dream to find him. Not when he settled down on the barstool of the village pub where he planned to lose all concept of reality.

“King George,” Max broke into a wavering grin. “It’s been a while since I saw you last.” He withdrew the cloth from the pint glass before turning it over on the drying mat.

George shot him a smile, one that was so hard to convoke it physically pained him. “It has.”

Max narrowed his gaze on him. Their smiles held no trace of genuineness behind them. The faint music from the overhead speakers swinging in with the chatter of the villagers around them filled their personal silence for a moment.

And George *hated* the way Max was looking at him because it seemed as if everybody just *knew* everything nowadays. Knew of his problem, knew of his grief, knew of his stress—everyone knew and no one could *help*. And it was all so fucking exhausting, George felt like he could break right then and there, under Max's stare.

Max breathed out. “Well,” He forced another grin. “Anything I can get for ya, Your Majesty? The usual?”

Come up. George thought back to the packet of white powder he had drained before he collapsed onto Dream's lap. *Comedown.* Thought back to Dream's tears which peppered his hair. *Remorse.* Thought back to the soul-gripping hold Dream had on him.

Relapse.

And with that much going on in his head, on top of everything he had heard from Sapnap's and Dream's conversation, George nodded. "Yes. The usual."

And repeat.



"Well, if it isn't my pride and joy." Sebastian's voice boomed from the head of the dining table.

Sapnap lightly juttet him inside when Dream froze in the doorway. "We're fine, bro. Keep going."

What made that hushed statement worse, alongside the rising panic within Dream, was how unsure Sapnap sounded.

And the forty sum pairs of eyes of the Vulcan warriors occupying the table.

And Punz's gaze, lingering in silent fury; an expression Sebastian held himself, more subtle and less on display as he always remained *deceivingly* calm.

"Come in, Dylan. Allow me to recapitulate what you've missed when fetching my son and his guard." Sebastian sighed, rising from his seat.

Dream was too shaken-up to have reached for his pocket knife. No outlet of distraction could kill the nerves that engulfed him as he was unable to look away from Sebastian, who addressed the room while still looking *directly* at Dream.

Dream could feel Dylan's eyes on him, too—no, Dream could feel *everyone's* eyes on him. "Upon receiving no word from The Nether, I decided to check in with them on the progress of our upcoming battle, which I then *found*...has been requested for annulment by Your Royal Highness."

Dream's glare shot to Punz. "You *fucking idiot*—"

"*Quiet*," Sebastian growled, silencing Dream before Punz could even retaliate. "You better not say a single word until I am finished, you hear me?" Dream reluctantly returned his attention to Sebastian. "You see, King George and my son, here, have been concocting a plan behind my back. They seem to think that I was responsible for Queen Anthea's death—now," The sound of creaking chairs sounded through the room as the warriors glanced at each other before replacing their gaze on Dream. "I don't know where *either* of them would get that idea," Dream was clenching his fist so hard, he could've sworn his nails were digging into his skin. "I would do no such thing." He smiled, a malicious upturn behind the assurance that he was the only one in possession of the sole proof Dream had to debate his statement. "She was my friend."

Dream relented a shaky breath. Sapnap stepped closer to him.

"King George doesn't seem to think so—no, King *George* wants me gone." Sebastian chuckled bitterly, shaking his head. "He's taken something from me—something I've worked *extremely* hard on. *All* on the basis of avenging *his* mother, *my* friend." Sebastian seemed to have stopped himself, almost like he knew he was going to lose his composure and blow his cover. "Now, as we know, King George is heavily influenced by drugs—*indulges* in them, so that may be where his delusion lies,"

Dream took an involuntary step forward, Sapnap clutched his elbow, pulling him back, and the whole room was once again staring right at him. Dream's temper was nearing its breaking point; so

much so that he was *numb* with rage—still on his footing as he glared back at his father through a blurred gaze.

“Nevertheless, King George has started something that I have no choice but to return with just as much effort. Therefore, I’ve decided to take him down.” Another chorus of chair creaks followed. “And as my men, I demand that you fight my honour against him.” He leaned back, straightened his shoulders as he finally looked away from his son to overlook the room. “We are going to battle against Salacia. Effective tomorrow.”

The room broke into chatter and murmurs.

Dylan stepped forward. “Sir, this Kingdom has never...we’ve never gone against a realm in our own Kingdom. Is that even—”

“What, seeable through conductive code?” Sebastian tilted his head to the side. Dylan swallowed. “Whatever code broken by a royal is to be served in return with likewise aggression.” He glazed over the room, receiving the uncertainty behind the eyes of his men. “This discussion is *final*—”

A chorus emulating a series of non-agreeable complaints followed.

“You are *all dismissed*.” Sebastian bellowed. “Get to the training field. Work ‘till exhaustion. Sleep it off.” He turned his back to them, fetching a drink from the accent table behind him. “The next time we will see each other,” He began, trickling water filling his glass echoed through the room before he turned around to face his men. “will be on the battlefield.” He raised his glass with a faint smile. “Good luck, my men.” He winked. “Make me proud.”

Ever since this morning, Dream felt like there were a lot of things he should’ve expected.

Dream *should’ve* expected their plan to go as earth-shatteringly wrong as it currently was. He *should’ve* expected that it would get to Sebastian. He *should’ve* expected Punz to tell Sebastian the truth.

But none of what he *should’ve* expected held him back from feeling the surmounting rage and fury that set his entire being aflame.

And it *somehow* always led back to George. Because Dream had a tendency of forgetting the world around him when he was with George. Tend to forget the bad things that lived in their universe, that begged itself to be seen through the shield George had around Dream—around them.

So, when it all came crashing down, Dream *should’ve* expected it, but it still rocked him off the unsteady pedestal both he and George, and all his friends, struggled to stay on through the concoction of this plan.

And when it all came crashing down, George wasn’t around. George was *part* of the crash when he crashed, himself.

George—his anchor and his weakness—was not present when Dream needed him most.

Dream nearly blacked out from finally being able to unleash the rage that built itself through Sebastian’s discourse, one he couldn’t interrupt because the Vulcan warriors were here.

But as they were no longer, Dream strode towards Punz, wrapped his fingers in a breath-possessing clutch around Punz’s neck before slamming him against the wall.

Dream’s words sounded through his core as he seethed, “You’re a *piece of shit* and you’re *fucking*

dead to me, you understand?” Punz’s face grew red as he sputtered out inaudible words. “You *love* being daddy’s *little bitch*, don’t you?” He pulled him forward, hands still clutching Punz’s neck before slamming him back against the wall. “*Love* being praised, you *fucking pussy*,” Dream was so blinded by his wrath that he blacked out at the moment that he spat directly in Punz’s face. “I hope you *fucking die*, Luke—”

“That’s *enough*.” There was a searing touch on his shoulder, one that was so scalding it momentarily snapped Dream out of his fury as he was thrown into a chair.

Dream tried to get out and he was still so out of it that he could barely pick up on Punz’s coughs and sputters as he tried to regulate his breathing. Sebastian held Dream down, pushing him into the seat with a scorching grip on Dream’s shoulders; one that grew hotter and hotter until Dream smelt his own flesh burning through the fabric of his shirt.

Hissing as he faltered under his father’s touch, Dream collapsed back into the chair. “Get the *fuck* off me,” He grunted until he completely snapped out of it, panting as he watched Punz stagger back against a wall, kneading his throat with a sharp wince; Dream could still see the burns of his fingerprints over the marked skin. “I hope you *fucking die*— *God*, I hope you *die*, Luke. Hope you *fucking rot*—”

“You don’t mean that—”

“ *Oh*, I do.” Dream tried to get up again, but Sebastian pushed him back down, grabbing a fistful of Dream’s hair as he forced Dream to look up at him.

“You are *not* in a position to act out right now—sit *the fuck* down.” He shoved away from the grip he had on Dream’s hair, nearly causing a crick in Dream’s neck before he faced Punz. “ *You*.” He grabbed Punz by the arm, harshly at first until he patted the limb as if he had forgotten which son he was handling. “Send Victoria in.”

“No need.” Victoria’s heels clicked against the floorboards as she entered the room, waving a manila folder at Sebastian. “Printed and ready.”

“Perfect. Thank you, doll.”

From the rage that simmered within Dream, on top of his mother’s opinion of Victoria, and from the memories of being in that cupboard when she was spitting malice in Niki’s face, Dream found himself sending daggers her way, causing her to catch his glance with a smile that had her cheekbones high and prominent.

“Hi, *Dream*.”

“It’s Clay.” *To you*.

“It’s betrayer, more like.” Victoria dug her palms into the dining table, chairs down from where Dream sat, yet still too close to him for his liking.

Dream squinted at her. “Oh, yeah?” There was a slow upturn at the corner of his lip, malice possessing his tongue as his voice unknowingly dropped an octave, “My dad tell you that when you were down on your knees sucking his dick like the *whore* that you are?”

A harsh grip was clutched at the back of his head, sending him face-first into the slab of wood. Dream felt the stinging through his nose, his hand flying straight to nurse it as he came back up, locking eyes with Victoria. He dropped his hand, the metallic taste of his blood slipping from his cupid’s bow down to his lips as he broke into a grin.

"I wouldn't get too attached, you know?" Dream chuckled.

"*Clay—*"

"Think he's still mourning the wife he killed, which...come to think of it," Dream tilted his head up to look at his father who lingered at his side, glaring down at Dream with a snarl. Dream slicked his tongue over his blood-stained lips as he said, "one of the reasons you wanted her dead was probably 'cause she preferred Felicity's tongue to yours, huh, dad?"

In a nanosecond, Dream felt the harsh sting through his nostrils again; this time, coming back up from the table a little weaker than before.

"Dad, *stop*," Punz begged at the doorway.

"Aw." Dream dropped his head against the backrest of the chair, "Starting to feel bad, little bro?" looking at Punz through a lidded gaze, spitting out the blood pooling in his mouth, onto the table. "*Good.*" Punz looked at him through a teary gaze and quivering lips. "'Cause this is *all* your fault."

"Alright. I've had enough—go get him." Sebastian ordered Punz, who remained still. Dream's head snapped in their direction as he watched Punz's tears slip from his face. "Go *get* him, Luke."

"Get who—who's 'him'?" Dream tried getting up but the moment Sebastian turned to look at him, Dream gripped the armrests of the chair instead. "Who?" He shouted after Punz, who kept walking towards the exit. "Is it George—are you talking about George?" *And the sheer thought of Punz going anywhere near George* had Dream rising from his seat. "Punz, get *your ass back here.*" He growled, ready to head straight for the door where Punz disappeared off to until Sebastian wrapped his arms firmly around his waist, pulling Dream's back against his chest. "Let *go* of me—don't *fucking* touch him," He thrashed around, pushing down on Sebastian's caging forearms as his hold around Dream tightened. "Let me *go*, let me *go*, don't fucking hurt him—*don't touch him—*"

"Vic." Dream heard Sebastian say through his lament and thrashes as he continued to fight his grip.

And in a split second, he felt the air being squeezed out of his lungs, stealing the volume behind his voice as he shouted for Punz. But Dream didn't back down—watching Victoria lure his breath out, Dream felt faint as he continued to fight tirelessly.

"Don't...hurt George...don't..." Dream's voice shot through a cough as he felt his vision blur, "...please."



George didn't know where he was.

He started seeing some spots of the pub in fragments before blacking out again. He could feel someone's arms around his waist, around his shoulders, caught a whiff of a woman's perfume, could feel manicured nails on his skin, wet kisses on his neck.

Everything was happening so fast and so slow at the same time, that at some point, George gave up on trying to be present.

And then he felt strong arms pull him away from dainty ones, heard a hushed voice speak his name and in that instance, George's first thought was Dream. So, he surrendered to the touch and allowed Dream to take him into his arms.

George sloppily clung onto Dream, slurring, “Dr’m...?” into his neck.

“Yeah,” Dream’s voice sounded off, but relatively close. George blamed this confusion on the fact that he was mangled. “C’mon. Let’s go.”

“Thank you.” George heard himself say before he felt Dream’s arms scoop him up from the ground. “I’m sorry.”

Dream maneuvered them through the crowd that had formed overnight. George realized he was outside when the air became less stuffy. That’s about when he was briefly knocked out of his drunken haze, looking up at the man whose shoulders were wrapped by his arms and finally discerned that it *wasn’t* Dream.

“Punz? What the fuck?” The ground seemed closer to his face when Punz put him back down. “What’s going on?”

“I need you to...” Punz held George up when the ground was starting to get a little *too* close. “Dream needs you. In Vulcan.”

George’s lips quivered as he immediately started feeling *present*. “Is he...angry? With me?” He looked up at Punz. “Is he?”

Punz drew in his bottom lip as he shook his head.

“He is, isn’t he?” George covered his face with his hands. “I didn’t mean to hurt him—you—” His hands lazily slipped off his face, limbs feeling like jello as he weakly shoved Punz, barely budging him. “You fucking *asshole*—you gave me the drugs—*fuck you*. ”

“King George, I—”

“*Fuck* you. I’m not—I’m not *going...anywhere...with you*.” George stumbled in his step, the gravel scraping under the soles of his boots. “Dream doesn’t...trust you...so I-I don’t...trust you.” He felt nauseous with every spoken word, staggering forward with a hand reaching for a surface as he felt his eyes close. “Don’t...get near me—I’m not...going...” and before George knew it, he collapsed against Punz, “...I’m not...” where it went momentarily dark before he went fully unconscious.



When George woke up, he was being carried through the halls of the Vulcan palace and it took him a few seconds before he realized that he *hadn’t* dreamt that whole interaction outside the pub, having him thrash out of Punz’s hold before he was reprimanded once again.

“*Piss off*. Get the *fuck off* me.” George elbowed Punz only to have his arms locked and pressed behind his back.

Before he could utter another series of complaints, George was thrown into the dining room where he shot a glare Punz’s way once he was finally released from his hold.

“*Dickhead*. What the *fuck* is your problem?” George seethed.

The rate at which the words flew from his mouth along with the irritation that quickly returned to him was enough for George to realize that he had sobered up a *tiny* bit in the time that he dozed off during the travel.

But whatever anger resided at his core quickly vanished when a voice spoke from the other end of the room.

“King George,” Sebastian met eyes with him, but George’s gaze fell on Dream; sat in the chair Sebastian stood behind—*defeated and slipping in and out of consciousness*. “Nice to see you’re still on a bender. Did the drugs treat you well?”

It wasn’t until Victoria slipped a hand over his shoulder on her way out that George realized she was here—until she wasn’t. Returning his gaze to Dream, George was *entirely* ripped out of his drunken haze. Dream sported bloodied lips, his eyelids heavy.

“Dream...” George beckoned under his breath, walking over to him almost instantly until he felt a searing touch surround his wrists, followed by Punz firm grip on his shoulder.

Looking down at his wrists, he watched the ring of fire animate his skin, leaving a burn he wasn’t familiar with—not Dream’s warmth, but Sebastian’s wrath.

“Move one more inch and I’ll make sure you’re burnt down to ashes before you even make it to my son, Your Majesty.” Sebastian calmly stated.

“What the hell did you do to him?” George tore his gaze from Sebastian to waver it on Dream’s countenance. “Dream—”

“I’m okay.” Dream sputtered, followed by a half-nod; not assuring George in the slightest bit.

George couldn’t even focus on the burn, too entrapped by the state of Dream which seemed to be deteriorating the longer he sat in that chair, which was when George noticed the circles of fire tying Dream’s wrists down to the armrests.

George shot Sebastian a choleric look. “What do you want?”

“Quite the attitude for someone who’s not in any position to—”

“I’m not scared of you.” George straightened his shoulders, dismissing the burn that seemed to have increased in heat. “I don’t care what you fucking know. Just let him go and we’ll sort this out. This is between you and me.”

Dream shook his head. “Don’t, George.”

George ignored him, no matter how much it hurt doing so. “Let him go.” He repeated.

“Now, how can you say this is just between you and me when you’ve roped my son into this situation?” Sebastian gripped the top rail of Dream’s chair. “Hm?” George clenched his jaw, the growing irritation kicking in with his withdrawals. “Shall I give you a rundown of what I told ‘Dream’ in your absence?”

George didn’t answer but briefly stole a glimpse at Dream who looked at him with glossy irises. George quickly looked away, *this was all my fault*.

Dream was facing the wrath that was solely George’s responsibility. And this was happening because he was too busy getting wasted in the village pub. And he was *so fucking tired* of bringing Dream down with him.

And as much as Sebastian was a menace, he was right about one thing: *I did bring you into this*. He blinked back his tears before forcing himself to look at Dream, who shifted his gaze to the table,

translucent pearls gliding down his flushed cheeks.

“I’ve conspired a contract,” Sebastian began. “In there states that the battle is no longer between the Kingdom and The Nether, but rather, Vulcan and Salacia. This contract requires three signatures. Mine, yours...” He glimpsed down at his son, harshly fisting his hair to hold Dream’s head up. George fought to hold Dream’s gaze, but couldn’t push down his wince for the hurt he could sense coursing for Dream. “...and his.” He let go of Dream’s hair with a terse push, George looked away from them. “Your signature is to concede to a battle which will remain between Salacia and Vulcan. No help from Terra or Eurys on either of our behalf—”

“Fine,” George said through gritted teeth.

“*George*, don’t—”

Sebastian tutted, clenching his fist so as to tighten the ring of fire around Dream’s wrists. “You don’t *speak* right now—”

Dream ignored him. “Don’t agree to it, George—” Another clench of Sebastian’s fist, reeling a hiss and a jerk from Dream.

“Dream, stop talking,” George begged, feeling a similar burn at his wrist, pulling him back in the step he involuntarily took towards Dream.

“This can go so much easier if you both *just listen*.” Sebastian huffed exasperatingly.

“Fucking get on with it, then,” George growled, the surge of anger rooted in Dream’s hurt as Dream squirmed under the fiery touch.

Sebastian chuckled inwardly, throwing his hands up lightly. “I suppose I owe you *something* for what Queen Anthea suffered.”

George sucked in a sharp breath. There was no denying it now. No pretending to play nice as he once had in the hallway when they bumped into each other.

“You know, I gotta give it to you, King George,” Sebastian said as he turned the corner of the table to fetch the contract from the manila folder. “I didn’t think you’d get this far. Thought you’d have relapsed sooner, maybe even overdosed—make my job easier.” George saw Dream slide up in his chair and immediately sent him a glare, silently begging him to sit still. Dream let out a ragged breath before complying with George’s speechless command. “But here we are and now we have to take these *drastic* measures.” Sebastian rolled his eyes, pulling out the contract before turning it over on the table. “Which I hope can be less drastic with a bit of cooperativeness from the both of you.”

“Any day now.” George pressed.

Sebastian smirked. “I like your attitude.” He pulled out a pen and placed it atop the contract before looking up at George from across the table. “How much do you love my son, King George?”

George could see Dream’s agitation from the corner of his eye, deriving the next words from George’s mouth as he fixed Sebastian. “Just give me the fucking pen, mate.”

Sebastian tilted his head to the side with a small pout. “Humour me.”

“*Leave* it, dad.”

Another clench of Sebastian's fist derived a jerk from Dream as he suppressed a grunt.

George winced, quickly uttering out, "I love him more than anyone I've ever known." so as to loosen the contraction of Sebastian's fist.

George heard Dream cuss out through a susurrate as the confession didn't help the situation, despite Sebastian having unclenched his hand.

"So, you'll happily help him repent?" Sebastian asked.

"What?"

"He betrayed me." Sebastian easily stated. "But since I'm a forgiving person, I've decided to give him an ultimatum." George blinked at him. "*His* signature, Your Majesty, is a promise that he will fight by my side instead of yours. And in doing so, the crown remains in his succession."

"If not?"

"Well, it goes to Luke." Sebastian looked over George's shoulder where he stole a glimpse at Punz. "Now, if you sign it, it'd be sort of useless for Clay not to agree to his part of the contract."

Noticing that Dream opened his mouth to interject, George quickly said, "*Don't*, Dream." keeping his gaze on Sebastian, yet reprimanding Dream's impending interruption because the *last* thing he needed was Dream's physical pain on top of the one that lay within his teary gaze; one George couldn't face for the life of him because it would shatter the facade he was putting on to stand his ground with Sebastian. "And what's your part?"

"To assure that you both get what you're signing for. Assurance that when I pass, the crown is without a doubt going to Clay. And that I will also not use any external powers for our battle tomorrow."

Tomorrow. George's head began to spin and he wasn't sure if it was because of the rising bile from wanting to puke out the liquor or the fact that he was in no position to fight in a battle in the mental or physical state he was in.

Sebastian perched over the table, extending the pen towards George and that's when the scalding touch around his wrists ceased, the fiery ring desisting its hold. "So, what do you say, King George?"

Glancing down at the contract, George realized what he was *really* signing it for.

And all considerations brought him back to the conversation he had with Dream, prior to that "I'm proud of you." How George felt like he was never going to change following Quackity's "You're still the same old George." Or how George felt an inundation of remorse coursing through him when Dream had been battling with the news of all this and couldn't bring it to George because he was high out of his fucking mind and too fragile during his comedown.

George was only an obstacle, for things that he felt he had no control over. And if the one thing he could have control over—the one thing he could grant Dream, the one 'out' he *could* give him, lived in that pen that Sebastian tended towards him—George was going to do it.

Because I do love you. More than anyone I've known. More than myself.

And it would *kill* George to let go. It would *end* George to artificially break the bond between them. And George had no faith in surviving the battle, but he couldn't care less. Because Dream

needed to come out of that battle alive—Dream *deserved* that crown more than George wanted to walk this earth; a universe where he always felt he never belonged, a universe he constantly tried to escape through drugs or alcohol.

And why should he take that away from Dream? Why should he bring Dream down with him?

So, taking the pen from Sebastian, George clicked it to use—*because if I don't do it, you never will.*

“George, *please.*” Dream whimpered and his voice was immediately reprimanded through a grunt when Sebastian clenched his fist once again.

George quickly scribed his signature so as to end the pain, but when he tossed the pen onto the paper, Sebastian didn't unclench his fist. “Let *go.*” He growled. “I fucking signed it.”

Sebastian unclenched his fist when he returned his attention to George, who failed to push down his tears, especially with the burn that followed when Punz held his stinging wrists against his back once more.

Sebastian scribbled his own signature before sliding the paper to Dream. “Don't have much of a choice now, do you, son?” He placed the pen in Dream's trembling fingers. “Go on.”

But Dream didn't move his hand, despite the dotted line being accessible to him where his wrists were pinned under fire. And when he failed to comply, Sebastian applied more heat on the rings that seared Dream's skin.

“Dream, *sign it,*” George shouted, almost like he could feel Dream's pain when Dream bit down on his lip, his free hand clutching the armrest. “*Dream.*”

Dream breathed out shakily before quickly signing on the dotted line and dropping the pen back on the paper.

“Wasn't so hard, was it?” Sebastian patted Dream's cheek.

It took every fibre within George to not lurch forward, pull Dream's sword from his harness and stab Sebastian with it. “You got what you wanted—now, let him go.”

Sebastian nodded, slipping the contract back into the manila folder. “Pleasure doing business with you, boys.” He turned on his heel, not releasing Dream's scalding restraints until he reached the doorway and looked at George. “And seeing as you are no longer welcomed here, my guards will come fetch you in a few seconds.” Sebastian dwindled his hand, releasing Dream. “Say your goodbyes.” He bowed his head before disappearing behind the door.

George was too out of it to realize that Punz had desisted his grip on him, so when he saw Punz follow behind Sebastian, George wasted no time in rushing towards Dream, who had already been making his way towards George—the two of them crashing into each other's embrace.

“Look at me,” George pulled away, cradling Dream's face, the pad of his thumb gliding over Dream's tears. “Are you okay? Are you hur—does it hurt?”

“Why did you do that, George?” Dream breathlessly asked. “Why did you fucking sign it?”

George's fingers halted in their caress. He looked up into glossy green irises and slowly shrugged. “I had to, Dream.”

Dream squeezed George's biceps. "We could've figured something out." George averted his gaze. "I could've figured something out."

George sighed. "All odds were always against us, Dream." He swallowed, forcing himself to look up into Dream's eyes. George still felt dizzy from the unravelling events atop the dwelling traces of alcohol; drying his eyes, augmenting his tears. "It was never in our favour. None of it was—"

"Don't, George." Dream spoke through slightly gritted teeth, avoiding his gaze, but keeping his hands firm around George's arms.

"It's the truth," Hurt and defeat lacing themselves through viridian. "I heard you and Sapnap outside your room—Dream, you couldn't even tell me that all of this was happening because I was too fucked out of my mind. I am *not* well. I won't be—"

"That's *fine*—"

"I *relapsed*, Dream." George exasperatingly said, a fervour to his tone he hadn't meant to possess. "I relapsed." He weakly reiterated. "I'm not made for this," He began. "I never was. But you are, okay?"

"What are you saying, George—"

"I'm saying that if I don't let you go now, I never will. All I will ever do is bring you down with my—"

"Stop—"

"No. I won't." George definitively said. "We've been going in circles with this and I am not going to *stand* here and watch you lose the *one* thing you've always wanted—the one thing that's been rightfully yours."

"Look, you relapsed before and came back from it, okay? We can work through this—"

"Maybe." George nodded. "Yeah, maybe. But not right now. I told you this wouldn't work as long as your father's around and I am *not* blaming you or putting that on you—it's just the truth of it."

"We're getting rid of him, George. I promise—just—don't *do* this, okay?"

George ran his fingers through Dream's hair, pushing it away from where it stuck to his wet cheeks. "Already did, Dream. And I had to. Had to let you go because you won't let me go."

"Because I don't *want* to—"

"But you need to."

"*Stop giving up* on us."

"I'm not. I'm not. I'm just not giving up on *you*." George took a small breath in the time that Dream was dwelling on the words, not retaliating. "I had to do it. I had to sign it. You deserve that crown, Dream."

"But I want you, too." Dream puled. "I need you, George." George had to look away because having to hold this conversation and pretend like it wasn't *killing* him to play the opposing side of the argument was destroying him. "I can't go against you. I *won't*—"

"You have to—"

“*Stop.*”

George lightly pushed Dream’s arms away so that he could cup Dream’s neck. “Look at me,” He reeled a deep breath, mustering all the courage he could despite the welling tears in both his and Dream’s eyes. “For *once*, take care of *yourself*, Dream. Do something for *yourself*.” He caressed his thumb over Dream’s slipping tears. “Do yourself a favour.” His soul continued to shrink within itself with his own words. “Go into that battle and *get* that *crown*.”

Dream shook his head. “Not without you. I’m not coming out of that battle without you—”

“You’re going to look after yourself *first and foremost*—”

“*No*, George—”

“*Yes*,” George growled, clutching his face. “Yes, you are.”

Dream susurrated through growing tears, pushing George’s own into a merciless course as they both fought to maintain their composure. “I can’t—I don’t want—I’m not doing it without you—”

The doors behind them burst open and they simultaneously flinched at the sound, looking over before rekindling their gaze in a state of panic.

“George—”

“It’s okay. It’s okay.” George assured.

“Stop.” Dream’s hands returned to grip George’s biceps. “*Don’t fucking leave—*”

“Listen to me,” George pushed his thumb up against Dream’s jaw, holding his head up. “Come out of this battle alive, you understand?”

“Not unless you’re coming *with* me.”

The guards’ footsteps neared them and George’s heart was pounding in his chest, his wrists burned, and Dream’s grip on him tightened, but George pushed all of that down for Dream’s sake.

Knocking his forehead against Dream’s, “Whatever happens, it’s you before me, yeah?” George kissed the tip of Dream’s nose. “Take care of yourself, Dream.”

Dream pressed their foreheads. “Don’t go—please don’t go.” He ushered, clutching George’s arms.

“Come out of this alive, Dream,” George whispered, breath shaky as he fought to maintain his smile. “Come out of this a King.”

The guards seemed hesitant to pull George away, despite their grips on his shoulders.

Dream re-opened his eyes as George pulled away from him slightly. “*Please—*”

“*Promise* me.” George strenuously spoke, hands slipping from Dream’s face.

Dream allowed his grip to loosen around George, the growing distance between them, though mild, already tearing the both of them to pieces.

“Promise me, Dream.” George urged with a small nod and a wavering smile.

Dream, defeated through his whisper and his teary gaze, uttered out, “I promise.”

George broke into a grin, an unimaginable pain shooting through his veins as he forced himself to look at Dream one last time. “I love you.”

George turned away before Dream could say anything, not that he seemed like he was going to—the both of them growing paralyzed with the distance that grew in every weighted step George took towards the exit.

His hands shook, his heart pounded, and he felt like he was going insane with every elapsing second. A hand was placed onto his shoulder and he couldn’t even flinch, staring at the ground and zoning out to nowhere in particular as his mind drew blank because—*this wasn’t happening*.

He felt like he could pass out from growing nausea and his looming withdrawals. He felt like he could fall unconscious from the dehydration and the fact that it felt as if he hadn’t taken a breath since entering that room, nor since having left it.

He brainlessly looked up from the hand to meet Sapnap’s gaze, who paused for a moment when he caught George’s own. “Sorry they had to pull you out of there, we weren’t in charge—”

“It’s fine.” George’s tone was sedentary, brain on auto-pilot as a lonely tear trickled down his cheek.

“We heard...um,” Sapnap swallowed. “We heard everything—we’re so sorry, King George.”

George was looking at him but he could tell, from the look on Sapnap’s face, that Sapnap knew he was looking *right* through him. “It’s alright.”

“Thank you,” Sapnap whispered. “for doing that.”

But that reeled George out of his trance as he finally looked into blue-grey irises and the sheer feeling of being yanked back into *this* reality was already breaking him that he couldn’t even accept the gratitude, barely mustering a nod before moving past Sapnap and heading straight for the exit.

Prior to that moment, George felt like Metanoia and relationship ties, in general, were a load of bullshit. And he went through the portal, brainlessly walked through the village with that same stagnant look on his face and his brain returning on auto-pilot for his own sake, until he reached Salacia.

Where he almost walked towards the staircase until he halted in his steps.

There was something that had been brewing in his silence, something deep within him that had his breath shaky at first until his breathing turned into heaves, which then shifted into his whole body trembling with an undying urge to *combust*—and as he let out an involuntary soul-shattering scream, momentarily blacking out—George opened his eyes to find himself drenched in the water that had been fully exerted from the fountain of Salacia.

The history of melancholia includes all of us.

Like a love lost, unrequited on the basis of safeness—too much of it, turning it platonic, but soulful for eternity.



Karl didn't realize he had to worry about George.

George had broken his silence, he was back to normal. George spoke his doubts about his and Dream's relationship, but Quackity informed Karl that the lovers had spent the night together. George found a way to smelt Anthea's necklace into two rings, one for himself and for Quackity.

From the sound of it, George was doing fine.

From the look of it,

Karl opened the door to the atelier and was faced with the vacant look he familiarized himself with all those years. "George?"

"Can I stay here tonight?"

George was not fine.

Karl narrowed his eyes on him: stoic expression, unsteady hands and jittery inclinations. He quietly replied, "Of course."

George walked past Karl to step in and the whiff of alcohol deemed all of Karl's assumptions true.

Karl remained still at the door, staring blankly outside, hand on the doorknob, the other clutching his glass of water, "You relapsed."

George's footsteps ceased where they previously sounded against the floorboards. The pair remained back to back.

"Save me the lecture, Karl," George muttered.

Karl was immediately brought back to the day George returned from one-on-one practice with Dream. How he exploded at Karl for not handing over the drugs, blaming Karl for the way he was, following his breakdown when he crashed into Karl's arms.

Karl turned around after closing the door to face George; watching his best friend fidget with things on the kitchen counter, walking around the table, doing *anything* to delay the reason behind his visit.

Because from years of experience, he *knew* the reason behind the visits at this time of night: when George was left alone with his thoughts but didn't want to be.

Karl didn't say anything. Didn't give George a lecture as he continued to watch George pick things up from his desk, restless as he fiddled with the trinkets.

This wasn't the comedown from alcohol—these were signs of withdrawals from crystallines.

Karl didn't realize he had to worry about George. Until he *realized* that the drugs Punz had purchased were not for Punz himself.

"Do you want water?" Karl calmly asked, readying himself for the harsh 'no' and the outburst to follow.

George didn't do that. George kept his eyes on the rock he tossed in the air before catching it in his hand. "No, Karl." He mumbled, placing the rock back onto the desk. "I don't want water."

Karl tested his chances. "What do you want, then?"

The crackling logs in the hearth of the fire filled their silence.

George finally lifted his gaze from where it dived the desk. He looked at Karl, brows knitted and lips pursed to the side as he aimlessly tapped his fingers at the edge of the desk.

“What do you want, George?”

George swallowed, sucking in a sharp breath. Karl had been holding his; prepared to decline George’s impending request for drugs.

“Dream,” George uttered through a whisper. “I want Dream.”

At that point, Karl was point-blank confused. “Then...what are you doing here?”

There was something so unsettling from the way George was calm, but also not at all. In fact, it was the growing agitation of his withdrawal with the way George was *clearly* trying so hard to keep it together.

“Forgetting. Hoping to.”

“Look, if you relapsed, Dream will understand—”

“He was the first to know that I relapsed, Karl.” George clipped, Karl paused. “S’not about that.”

“Then...?”

“Sebastian found out.”

Karl went temporarily deaf with the downfall of what felt like tumbling rocks crashing down on his shoulders.

“He knows everything.”

Karl felt a shiver run down his spine, either from the chill he felt from the glass of water in his hand or the rate at which he was processing the news: *he wasn’t*.

“We’re going to battle tomorrow.”

Karl ripped his stare from the ground and placed it onto George. “What?” He asked under his breath.

Either George didn’t hear him or he couldn’t manage words to explain, but what came next was the return of George’s impediment. “I...s-s-signed it. The...c-con...con...” He breathed out, frustrated.

Karl walked over to him, not dismissing the way George unintentionally stepped back. For a second, he was unsure of the surprising flinch—especially when George never once seemed startled *around* Karl—until he noticed the burn in the form of a ring on both of George’s wrists.

“What the *fuck*? Who did this to you?” Karl reached for his wrists, but George tucked his hands in his pocket where they trembled at a concerning pace. “George.” He warningly attempted but kept his voice at a base level.

George cowered in his spot, shoulders drawing up to his ears as his lips quivered with a faint whimper. “I want...wanted, Dr-Dream t-to—”

“Okay, George, hey,” Karl cradled his cheek, the warm tear slipping in between their brushing skins. “It’s *me*, handsome. You can talk to me. You know that.”

Maybe it was the use of his nickname for George or the touch itself, but George seemed to have snapped out of his trance with the laxness of his shoulders as a slow exhale left him. Whatever it was that brought George back to him, Karl was thankful because he was just *now* catching up to the fact that Sebastian *knew*—meaning that their plan was *way* past salvation.

Karl moved his hand to the curve of George’s neck. “Tell me everything.”

And as George recapped the entire situation without taking a beat, even if several tears were shed in the process of doing so, all Karl could think back on was that the battle was to happen *tomorrow*.

That thought alone was traumatizing but what made the situation worse was George’s mental and physical state: how it was on the brink of full deterioration. Because although George didn’t know it yet, he was about to face the *biggest* comedown of his life.

The history of melancholia includes all of us.

**And a boy’s innate, flickering flame—fading sunlight—rekindled by those who always
gravitated towards him in an eclipse.**



Dream felt like he was right where he began, before having met George.

Landing punch after punch on the dummy as he stood in the dimly lit training field. His lungs felt like they were on fire; from having cried his eyes dry, from not remembering to have a single sip of water as he depleted his energy through the jabs of his sword or kicks at the dummy’s head that he imagined as Punz’s or his father’s.

He did that so he wouldn’t have to think about George. About how he lost him tonight. Because no matter how many times George tried to reassure him that they’d rekindle after the battle, there was something foreboding about the idea of the battle being solely between Vulcan and Salacia.

Dream felt like this was the first time he hated being in a realm best known for their warriors—how they won every battle as a stand-alone realm due to Sebastian’s ruling.

Dream felt like he was right where he began, before having met his anchor.

George. Dream threw a tireless hit, despite his lungs reaching their limit. *Your gentle caress.* He threw another punch, his breath stuttering as he staggered in his step. *Your laugh, the sound of it resonating in the space of our mouths.* Dream sucked in a sharp breath, tripping forward and steadying himself on the dummy as he landed another punch, *your ethereal silence when you’re losing yourself in your books,* his knuckles *barely* brushed the dummy as he stumbled into it, forehead clashing against the rubber, *the melodies leaving that pretty brain of yours, into your dainty fingers and across the ivory bones—my love.*

“*Fuck.*” Dream faltered against the dummy before giving it a harsh shove, having it fall back onto the grass. “*Shit.*” His breath stuttered as he crouched down to the ground, clutching his side as a pang shot through his muscles.

Dream didn’t want to think about George, but how was he to do so when George had rekindled the tenderness that every fibre of his being deeply craved? Only to rip it away from him,

unintentionally—which made it *that* much worse.

Because I can't hate you.

"For once, take care of yourself, Dream."

I love you.

Dream felt like a fucking idiot for not saying it back. For having never said it. All those times that George gave him an opening to.

And now there would never be a right time.

Because if Vulcan kept up their streak of being the overpowering realm of every battle they attended, Dream would never get the chance.

"Dream."

Dream's head perked from where it rested on his forearms. He met eyes with Sapnap who had the forty-sum Vulcan warriors in tow, excluding Punz—for that, Dream was grateful.

"That's enough practice, don't ya think?" Sapnap gave him his hand, but Dream only looked at it. "C'mon, bro."

Dream weakly placed his hand in Sapnap's, allowing him to flawlessly pull him up to his feet. He looked from Sapnap to the warriors. "What are you all doing here?"

"We heard that conversation between you and King George," Sapnap spoke on their behalf, regaining Dream's attention.

"I don't wanna talk about it, Sap."

"I know." Sapnap hushed. "Which is why we're here." Dream's brows knitted. "Look, we all know how much you love and care for him—King George. And we've all seen you bite your tongue when Sebastian—"

"I'm not in the mood for a pep talk—"

"Let me talk." Sapnap cut him off indefinitely. "Remember this morning, when I told you that we all agreed the crown always belonged to you?" Dream hardly nodded, stealing glances at the warriors when they exchanged looks within themselves; dancing smiles and pushed down smirks. "Dream, we've watched you suffer through all the shit that Sebastian has taken from you and we're not gonna do it anymore. We know what really happened with Queen Anthea—I mean *I* knew it, for a fact, but they didn't—"

"We believe it. He's fucking evil." Dylan said, earning a chorus of agreements from the men surrounding him. "Wouldn't put it past him."

"Alright, where are you going with this, Nick?" Dream was growing exasperated having to constantly be *present* in this reality that has now become permanent, growing permanent with every word slipping out of Sapnap's mouth.

"Dream, whatever you wanna do tomorrow, we'll follow your lead." Sapnap began. "Whatever you say, goes—as we are no longer following Sebastian's orders,"

Dream's eyes immediately left Sapnap's when he watched the crowd behind him lower down to

the ground; each and every warrior getting down on a knee. “Sap—”

“Whatever you decide to do, we’re right behind you.”

All of Dream’s words remained in the breath that caught itself between his lips as he stared back at the Vulcan warriors, bowing down to him as they once did for Sebastian.

Sapnap began lowering himself to the ground and Dream snapped out of it, shaking his head, “Get up, Nick. That’s enough.”

Sapnap chuckled, wholly ignoring Dream as he knelt down in front of him, looking up at Dream with a grin etched across his face.

Dream was met with toothy smiles and couldn’t push down his own. He knew they always had his back, never kept quiet when Sebastian would try to put him down—always chiming in to ease the tension with shitty jokes, but ones that shed the weight of Dream’s shoulders for a bit—*but to follow his orders when the crown wasn’t yet his?*

He stood staring back at them, willingly bowing down with pride and caught a glimpse of his future—one without Sebastian. And the sheer possibility of seeing this on the day of his coronation, when the day would come, made his heart swell with ardour.

Dream blinked back his tears as he shook his head. “Alright, get up. You guys made your point.”

Teasingly, they all chorused, “Yes, King.” Sapnap included which almost granted the younger of the two a playful kick from Dream.

“Look, the crown may not be yours yet. But we’re starting this shit as of today.” Sapnap said as he got up from the ground to level eyes with Dream, still having to look up slightly. “We’re taking orders from you and you only. Because we’re getting rid of him, Dream. It’s been collectively agreed.”

Dream glanced at the crowd, receiving their confirmation. And part of what felt like a dream suddenly turned into his biggest nightmare when he realized that he had *no* fucking clue *what* to do—how to fix it.

“I don’t even know what to do, Sap.”

“Of course, you do.” Sapnap winked. “Last resort, brother.”

Dream narrowed his eyes on him until they drifted off to the side with a slow realization. Locking eyes with Sapnap again, the both of them broke into a knowing grin.

Play dead.

Chapter End Notes

the angst will be over soon. i promise. i promise.
thank u for the nice, as always. see u in the next one x

Dead in This House

Chapter Notes

TW: needles (with alchemized herbs in the dose, whatever the fuck that mean this alternate universe. it's just not what Mundanes would be using needles for if u catch my Drift). i guess another warning is that there is a litch rall battle happening so deaths and **near deaths** are to be expected. yes? yes. alright enjoy. appreciate ya! x

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



George's head was in his lap by the end of his recap on everything Karl had missed. Everything that somehow happened in the bit of time they hadn't been together. *Everything* happened—everything that could've gone wrong *was* happening.

Karl's fingers continued in a mindless course through swarthy curls. The occasional grazes of his fingernails on George's scalp when he could feel George's tears, one drop after the other, wet against his thigh, through the fabric of his slacks.

The timeline of the events George lived through that evening was as disarray as his thoughts, voiced through interjecting babbles:

"I love him. I love Dream. I love him so much." Coalesced with, "I can't lead a battle. I don't want Quackity to get hurt." interlaced with, "I had to sign it, Karl. I had to sign it. Didn't want anyone else to get hurt on my account." all while George recapped the moment he relapsed to the moment he stepped out of the Vulcan dining hall.

That's about when Karl knew it was creeping up on George: the comedown, the grief, and everything that was about to cause the biggest storm this atelier has witnessed.

"Help me," George whispered after having come down from his heavens.

Karl's fingers came to a slow stop through George's hair, gaze treading from George's head to the fireplace before them.

"I can't do this sober."

There it was. Karl braced himself for something he wasn't sure he could handle after barely digesting every occurrence that led up to this moment.

"You understand why I can't. Right, Karl?"

"Yeah."

"So," Karl's eyes fluttered shut. "You'll help me?"

When a silence passed, George fully turned his head flush against the gap of Karl's thighs. Looking up at him, George repeated, "Karl, you're gonna help me."

Questions turning into demands, not even seconds into the impending altercation.

Karl looked down at him. *You've dealt with him before.* "No." George's expression immediately dulled. *You can do it again.* "I can't, handsome."

"I *just*—" George clipped his own words, catching himself—for his own sake—feigned over calmness growing over simmering anger. "—Karl, I just told you everything that happened to me." *Guilt-tripping through his returning narcissism.* "So," He sat up straight, Karl kept his gaze on his vacant lap. "You're not gonna let me...go through this...sober, are you?"

Karl didn't have to look at George to imagine the faint, helpless smile he plastered on to ease the growing tension.

In the small time that Karl had to reply before George got turbulent, he created a mental fortification around his emotions; arising ones that would dismiss his moral ground for George's reliance on drugs.

Sucking in a sharp breath, Karl turned his head to look at George—desperation screaming behind brown irises. "I am." George's eyes fluttered as if the answer made him flinch. "Because you need to learn how to cope without drugs, George."

George broke into a bitter laugh. Shaking his head, he got up from the couch, kneading his nape, his free hand clenched into a fist inside the pockets of his slacks.

"You're, like," George paused, back still to Karl as he dragged a breath to release, "You're just...*such a good fucking* person, aren't you?" through viciously gritted teeth.

There were moments in which Karl needed not to speak. That's what he gathered when having to deal with addicts. When their fuse blew, scrambling around to quickly turn it off would only make it worse.

So, Karl bit his tongue and he listened.

"M'tired of people like you." There was a wave of soundless anger when George slowly turned around to face Karl. "People like you *piss* me off." He continued. Karl let him. "Karl." He beckoned, but Karl remained wordless, causing George to reach for a cushion before lurching it at him, "*Fucking say something.*"

Karl placed the cushion he had caught mid-throw back from where George retrieved it. "What do you want me to say?" He softly replied, getting up from the couch and grabbing his glass of water from the coffee table in the process.

Karl refused to meet his gaze, knowing very well that dark honeyed eyes would have him caving to fulfil the desire behind them.

"That you'll help me." George re-diluted his tone down to deceitful softness.

"I'm not gonna encourage this—"

"Can you not fucking do that—can you not—"

"Can I not do what?" Karl continued tonelessly, with so much effort.

"Tell me how to *cope*—I mean what the *fuck*, Karl?" George lightly flailed his hand, the other still gripping the inside of his pocket. "Since when—*fuck* you. You don't...don't *switch* on me like

that.”

Blabbering was one of the many signs—nonsense words, jumbled by a mindset wired and determined on getting his fix.

Karl finally mustered the courage to look at him, immediately regretting doing so when he saw the frigid darkness where black gold used to thrive. “Switch on you?”

“I’m *tired* of everyone telling me what to do with my *life*.” George was back to raising his voice, physically leaning in with his words.

“I’m not telling you what to do, I’m just not gonna assist you in fucking it up—”

It happened in a flash of a second, premised with George’s exclamation, “*You already have.*” causing the water in Karl’s glass to ice before it shattered into pieces, crystallizing the carpet beneath them.

Another blown fuse, another instance where Karl had to maintain his composure. He was thankful for the instinct that had him letting go of the glass before the pieces could’ve pricked his skin.

Another blown fuse, another instance where Karl had to maintain his composure when George didn’t flinch or bat an eyelid at the explosion he caused; blinded with the determination of getting what he wanted, careless for the hurt of others.

Days ago, Karl was proud when George succeeded in creating a block of ice; having unlocked that part of him to utilize his powers. But seeing George use it out of malice, unintentionally, was *terrifying*.

“We’re not doing this again,”

The memory of that night simultaneously struck them.

George straightened his shoulders slightly, recollecting his breath. “We’re gonna keep doing it because it’s the truth.”

Karl stood his ground. “I’ve learned not to take anything you say to heart...when you get like this.”

“Oh, no?” George’s features relaxed, a small tug at the corner of his lips when he took a step forward. “S’that why you cried like a little *bitch* when we last had this conversation, then?”

Don’t play into it. Don’t congeal the ice.

Karl slicked his lips, setting his gaze dead-on George. “You see me crying now?”

George was too far gone to have even digested Karl’s words before continuing, “You cried because you know I’m right.” He took a step closer, so close Karl could feel his liquored breath against his lips. “You know it’s true.”

“Back up, George.” Calmly stated, yet received as a threat from the other.

George’s voice dropped down an octave as he said, “Imagine where I’d be today if you hadn’t given me that joint.”

“That’s enough,” Karl muttered, placing a hand on George’s chest when the space between them closed.

“An alcoholic, at best, but no. No, now I’m constantly chasing a bigger high ‘cause each one was better than the last.”

Karl inhaled sharply before levelling his tone with George’s. “That’s your fault.”

George fisted his shirt and it took everything within Karl not to return the aggression. “No, it’s *your* fucking fault—all your fault—‘*George, handsome, you have to try this one. This one hits you like no other—this one will have you seeing stars*’—no, yeah, you’re right.” He juttet Karl’s fisted jacket out of his grasp. “Not your fault at all.”

“I can feel bad without it actually being my fault, you know?”

George tilted his head to the side. “Oh, c’mon, darling.” Karl briefly shut his eyes on the endearing term used through malice. “You know you’re just telling yourself that so that when I’m ‘*six feet under*’,” He stepped forward again, Karl took a step back this time. “You won’t cry yourself to sleep wishing that I was still there—still there to hold you,” He had gotten so close in the time that Karl felt too shocked to move, the tips of their noses grazing. “To kiss you,” He whispered, seductive through malevolence, leaning his forehead against Karl’s. “*Touch you.*” His fingers splayed over Karl’s waist before he slipped them under his sweatshirt. “You’d miss that, wouldn’t you?” Karl’s breath stuttered, gradually falling into the touch. “You’d miss this.”

But *that* tone, the power of manipulation George had mastered when it came to getting his fix, had Karl’s fingers fastening themselves around George’s wrist, ripping the brunet from his inclinations as they locked eyes once more.

Knowing that he lost this battle through a simple discerning of Karl’s gaze, George’s glare returned. “Fucking pathetic how in love you are with me while I’m riding on Dream’s dick and you’re here fabricating your stupid little remedies—”

One of those words snapped Karl out instantly; gripping George’s wrist, deriving a wince from him. He pulled it away with ardour, straightening himself up, slitting his eyelids to look down on George. “You better stop talking right now—”

George matched his tone. “Or. *What?*”

“I’ll never talk to you again.” Karl’s answer was quick enough to create a shred of submission; George standing down like he’d been knocked off his high-horse.

Karl received that pride for a mere fraction of a second before George was back to challenging him—addiction pumping his relentless attempts in getting what he wanted.

“You know you can’t promise that.” George smirked, “Not even to yourself.” each spoken word accompanied by a cold breath that sheathed Karl’s face. “‘Cause you love me. I am *under your fucking skin.*” He continued, fearlessly—Karl’s silence feeding George’s confidence in winning the argument, “‘*Too late for me*’—how about yourself? You will *never* be able to attain your favourite high, Karl.” feeling closer to those cupboards being opened to reveal his pick of poison. “Because I will *never* love you the way you love me.”

What was once hushed to him as an apology was now being used against him. Karl’s fortified shield had been taking ruthless hits since George had entered his downward spiral and Karl could no longer handle it.

Stepping away from him entirely, Karl ran a hand through his hair, fixing his gaze on the carpet. “Get out.”

“I will hate you forever.” George continued, *desperately*.

Desperate because he hadn’t expected Karl to *give up*. Desperate because he wasn’t even realizing the weight of his own words; his mind *still* fixed on getting high.

Karl looked at him, face straight. “Get out.”

“No, not ‘will’—I hate you *right now*.”

“Then *get the fuck out*,” Karl growled.

George was taken aback. Karl never raised his voice at him, but on the rare occasions in which he did, no matter how out of it George was, it always knocked a breath out of him.

But still.

“Fine,” George whispered. “Yeah, fine—but you still supply Max those drugs he puts in our specialized drinks, so I’ll just go drink my weight in that. Don’t even know why I came he—”

In the time that George entered his discourse, Karl blindly followed him to the door. Because as much as he wanted George to understand that he couldn’t use manipulation—especially to get high—George *wasn’t* stable. George came here instead of going to the pub because deep down, the person that *wanted* to get better was still *fighting*.

That’s why you’re here.

Determined to remind George, Karl grabbed his forearm. “Stop.”

George laughed at that, turning around to face Karl. “See?” Lips gradually down-turning, “You still care.” George whispered shakily, “Still love me.”

Karl clung to that. Clung onto the lover that lived within George. The return of remorse and his faded heart.

“Of course, I do,” Karl whispered back. “It’s you who doesn’t want me to love you, not the other way around.” George shook his head: half-defiant and fully angry with himself. “I know it’s scary, okay? I know you’re scared. A lot of things are happening right now and you don’t wanna live through it—I *get* it.” He cupped George’s face. “But it’s gonna be okay.”

George’s shoulders slouched. “Oh. It’s gonna be okay,” Karl nodded, blinded by the weakened sarcasm. “Well, if Karl says it’s gonna be okay, then I guess surely everything’s okay, isn’t it?”

Don’t play into it. Don’t congeal the ice. Karl repeated like a mantra, still clutching George’s face.

“I make you feel safe.” Karl began quietly, coaxing George back into reality, away from the toxic thoughts wringing out the meaningless insults. “I make it all feel okay—you said that.” George’s lips quivered with his diluted scowl. “When you were *stone-cold* sober.” He continued, George’s silence giving him a push. “*That’s* the man I love.” *Not because I only love you when you’re sober, but because—*“That’s the man who loves me. And that’s the man *you* love, *too*.”

Find him. Bring him back.

For a brief moment where George stared back with welling tears, Karl thought he succeeded. But he should’ve known better.

In a split second, Karl’s arms were reprimanded in George’s bone-chilling grip. “*God, just give me*

the fucking drugs, Karl.” He shook him, walking Karl and himself deeper into the atelier.

Karl held onto him just as tight. “No—”

“Yes. Please. Fuck.”

George had gotten loud in the past, but the look in his eyes, the vein at his temple and the strung-out tendons in his neck as desperation leaked through every strained-out word had Karl *tantalized*.

As did the grip George had—prickling Karl’s skin as if he was being plunged into an ice bath, one that grew colder, one that was congealing him into a block of ice.

“It fucking hurts. I lost everything, Karl. I lost my mum, I lost Dream, I lost myself—I am nothing, I feel everything—fuck. Give me something.” Karl, despite being tormented with fear, mustered every bit of strength he could to whirl George around, pressing his back against his chest. George must’ve been so blinded by his own temptations that he wasn’t thrashing around in Karl’s hold, even if his screams remained, *“Give me something. Please. Please. Please.”* Karl kept one hand pressed against George’s shoulder as he sat him against the cupboard, opening another one to retrieve the sedative; rushing to uncap it. The soles of George’s boots slid up and down the floorboards as he squirmed in pain, *“I can’t do it without him—I can’t do it without Dream. Please, Karl. Please.”*

Karl flicked the retrieved needle of the shot, through a blurry gaze, trying his best to find George’s vein on his limp arm as he continued to pule, *“Make it stop. Please. Make it stop.”* Karl steadied George’s forearm against his thigh, *“It hurts so fucking bad—please.”* drew in a deep breath, and carefully plunged the needle through.

George’s body jerked forward at the touch, a gasp halted his stream of consciousness as his gaze froze on the legs of the dining table ahead. George’s breath stuttered as Karl blinked back his tears, some of them staining George’s wrists as he withdrew the needle, tossing it to the side.

With the oiled herbs of the shot working its way to his brain, to his muscles, wholly sedating him, George slurred through a whisper, “Thank you...” He rolled his head to the side, Karl’s face closing in behind his eyelids. “...m’sorry, I...love you...Karl.”

Karl faltered against the chair behind him, wordlessly and breathlessly staring back at George: fair eyelids heavy with opium, temporary peace enveloping him in a warm embrace.



Fire drove each and every of Dream’s emotions—warm when he’s happy, heated when he’s infatuated, explosive when he’s angry, and irreversibly blinded by fury when he’s helpless.

Helpless was Dream when he clutched onto George, convincing himself that it would be the last time he’d feel the curvature of George’s bicep against his palms. Or the last time he’d see bright things reflect onto the darkness of George’s irises. Or the softness of George’s lips against his—the lingering and pressing kisses which covered every inch of Dream’s face—or the brightest smile that lit every single part of him, down to his core.

Dream thinks he’d break right then and there if let himself think back to the sound of George’s laugh.

“You listening?” Sappnap asked after having squeezed Dream’s knee.

Dream glanced at him, clearly having not listened, but nodding anyway. Sappnap knew better,

shooting him an impish glare before returning his attention to the crowd. They had resulted in camping the training field, at least for a couple more hours until they would all head off to rest—*Dream hasn't worked out how he's gonna fall asleep with George in his head instead of his bed.*

“What’s this ‘play dead’ strat?” Dylan asked after veering his eyes from one of the warriors to Dream.

“Nick’ll walk you guys through it. For now,” Dream sat up from the grass. “We need to inform Salacia of the plan.”

“You need one of us to deliver the news?”

Dream caught one of the warrior’s gaze and it dawned on him, then, that everyone here was aware that Sebastian wasn’t going to let Dream out of his sight—especially not to see George.

“Right.” Dream cleared his throat, recollecting himself. “Yes. Please.”

“I can do it.” Sapnap sighed, stretching his arm above his head. “All of you need to get some rest for tomorrow. In fact, you should probably all head to your rooms now.”

The warriors didn’t move. Their attention drifted from Sapnap to Dream as if they were awaiting for him to speak.

Dream blinked back at them, hearing a small laugh escape Sapnap’s space, following his mutter, “Dismiss them, moron.”

Dream’s eyebrows shot up lightly as he returned his gaze to the warriors. “Oh. Uh...yeah—yes, you’re dismissed—” He watched all of them rise from the ground within seconds. “—actually,” He chimed in, they all turned around mid-step. “From now on, if you feel like leaving, just dismiss yourselves, alright?”

It felt wrong. Dream knew that the hierarchy worked this way: warriors following their King’s orders over their own natural instinct. But he didn’t realize the flaw in the system until that very moment; watching the warriors await his orders as if they couldn’t handle themselves when they probably wanted to but were wired to think otherwise.

“It’s...code of conduct, Your Majesty—”

“Okay, firstly—just call me by my first name, as you always did.” Dream chuckled nervously, glimpsing at Sapnap who smiled at the ground. “And secondly,” He glazed over the warriors, a cherished memory under the Terran moon arising with his words. “Fuck the code of conduct.”

“Treating you as our King is already proving to be a good decision.” Dylan winked at Dream, receiving a warm smile in return.

The training field that once occupied the realm’s warriors downsized to the pair of best friends; Sapnap lied down on his back, a soft grunt escaping him as he extended his arms on the grass. Dream lied down next to him.

“Can you do me a favour, when you deliver the news? Don’t tell George directly? Tell it to...not even Quackity. Tell it to...Karl—yeah, tell it to Karl.” Dream glimpsed at Sapnap, barely moving his head. “He’ll know when to break it to George.”

“Why?”

“I’m just not sure George is ready to handle more shit right now.” Dream ran a hand down his face. “Just because, um...he, like,” His eyes fluttered shut. “Fuck, Sap, he reeked of alcohol when Punz brought him in this evening.”

“*Brought him in?*” Sapnap propped himself up on his elbow, “Where’d he even go? Wasn’t he in your room?”

“Probably snuck out when Dylan fetched us for the meeting. He also overheard the entire conversation we had in the hallway, by the way, so that’s—”

“Ah, fuck.” Sapnap muttered under his breath, hanging his head slightly. “You okay?” He looked at Dream through a felled gaze, fingers indolently picking at the grass. “You...ready to talk about it?”

Dream mindlessly looked down at Sapnap’s hands. “I don’t know?” He glanced up at him. “No? Not really. Not gonna make any sense if I do. There’s no point.” He huffed, running his fingers through his hair, wishing they were George’s instead—*yeah, he wasn’t ready to talk about it.*

Sapnap jutted his bottom lip out with silent consideration before mumbling, “Doesn’t have to make sense. Nothing’s really been making sense nowadays, anyway.”

There was something about the way Sapnap said things that soothed confessions out of Dream when he wasn’t really one to talk about his emotions in the first place. But Sapnap had a tendency of saying hard-hitting things with so much nonchalance that it almost ruled out the importance of any situation; not in a way that made it lose its weight, but rather, in a way that would make evoking the anger a lot easier than repressing it.

“I just really fucking miss him, Nick.” Dream breathed out through a whisper. “And I know it sounds ridiculous, okay? I know it’s only been a couple of hours, but *fuck*, it...like...it fucking *hurts*. It’s *been* hurting. And when he relapsed...I, like, I could almost *feel* his pain? And it’s weird ‘cause I never felt my mom’s—no matter *how* many times I went through that with her—like, yeah, it fucking *sucked*, but...with *George*...I don’t know. It just *really* fucking hurts, Sap. I don’t know what it is.” He caught the way Sapnap’s eyes went wide. “Told you I wasn’t gonna make any sense.”

“I mean...I just look surprised ‘cause I can’t relate, but...” Sapnap half-shrugged. “...just sounds like you love him a lot, bro.”

Dream’s hands flew to his face. “Oh my *God*.”

“Jesus—*what?*”

“That’s another thing—he always fucking *says* it. That he *loves* me. And I haven’t said it back *once*.”

“I’m sure he knows that you do.” Sapnap broke into a nervous laugh. “He’d be stupid not to.”

“But what if I never get to say it?” Dream withdrew his hands, voice no longer muffled but directed to Sapnap, who stared back confused. “What if Sebastian gets to him before I can, tomorrow? What if he fucking—”

“Dude. You’ve got every single warrior out there on your side.” Sapnap assured, with so much ease it nearly alleviated all of Dream’s worries. *Nearly*. “You know *damn well* we’re not letting George out of our sight.” Dream blinked in surprise—that’s the first time you’ve said his name *without the title*—and in that, a bit of hope seeped into Dream for the promise Sapnap was making

him. “Don’t think about that shit right now. *You*,” He pointed a finger at Dream. “need to make sure your head is screwed on straight. Channel all that fucking anger and sadness and bring that motherfucker down. That’s the *only* thing you gotta worry about.”

Even if Dream wanted that to be the only thing, George was always going to be the first and last thing on his mind. And no matter how many hours of rest Dream would possibly get that night, none would be enough to prepare him for the battle against Salacia—*against George*.



“Karl...?”

Karl blinked his eyes open, Quackity’s face blurred into his vision before the concern corroding his expression became clear.

Glancing down at the weight in between his arms, Karl was hit with George’s scent. Mint and alcohol swirled through his nostrils as Karl sat up against the edge of the couch, waking himself up as Quackity remained silent—probably out of respect for noticing how out of it Karl looked.

“Hey.”

Quackity blinked at him. “‘*Hey*’? What the hell happened here?”

Instead of answering him for fear that he would break down at any given moment, Karl got up from the ground, arms still hooked underneath George’s. “Help me take him to bed?”

Quackity wavered on the question for a moment before complying. For that, Karl was thankful. But after they helped George’s limp body under the covers, making sure a pillow was assuaging his heavy head, Karl and Quackity dallied at the bedside in taut silence.

“He relapsed,” Quackity deduced. Karl’s eyelids flapped shut. “didn’t he?”

Admittedly, Karl was on the verge of a breakdown. Everything he suppressed since he let George inside the atelier had been growing through the trembling of his hands. So, he remained silent for his own sake.

“You give him the drugs?”

“I had to.”

Quackity sighed, stepping away from him, whirling a desperate breath from Karl.

The younger of the two dropped down on the sofa, head in hands, voice directed at the ground. “He has an *actual* problem, dude.” Karl half-turned away from him, the fogged window panes blurring in his vision. “We can’t keep *feeding* into it like we always have—”

“He came here freaking out. Like really freaking out. He wasn’t well—”

“He never fucking is. That’s the point.” The feeling Karl received when George was blaming him for his addiction returned with each and every word that was leaving Quackity’s mouth. “He’s been slowly *killing* himself this entire time and we’ve just been letting him. We can’t keep—”

“You don’t think I know that?” Karl snapped, turning around to face Quackity who straightened up in his seat at the tone used against him. “You don’t think I’m blaming myself enough for what I’ve done to him, so I need *you* to do it, too?”

“Wait, Karl—”

“No, you’re right. *I’m* the *prime* factor in his addiction. *I’ve* been spoon-feeding him this shit and it’s gotten to the point where the *only* way to help him is by giving him the drugs. And *yes*, I did that again by sedating him, but he was *hurting*, okay? Everyone can keep *blaming* me, but I’d rather have this *fucked up* version of him than to not have him at all.” Karl gasped shakily when snapping out of his outburst, glancing over at Quackity; slipping tears shining over his cheeks.

Quackity slowly rose from his seat, “I wasn’t blaming you.” Karl already began taking a step back.

Karl hated crying in front of others, especially around those closest to him. And when Quackity walked over, Karl’s first instinct was to put his hands out in front of him.

“It’s fine, Alex. I’m fine—”

Quackity dodged the swing of Karl’s hit, which had been directed at his chest when he was inches away from him. “Karl—”

“*Don’t*,” Karl shoved him away, hitting his chest once, “I’m *fine*—” twice, “I’m f—” three times before his wrists were reprimanded in Quackity’s grip.

Karl immediately shielded his tears in the curve of his palms, shoulders drawing up to his ears when he felt Quackity’s hands at his elbows, sliding up his biceps before pulling him into the most delicate embrace Karl had received in a long while—and *he broke down*.

Quackity brought one hand to the back of Karl’s head, lightly resting chestnut curls on the fabric of his puffer jacket. “Sorry.” He whispered against Karl’s shoulder. “I wasn’t blaming you.” He nestled his eyes into Karl’s cable-knit sweater. “I’m just scared for him.”

Karl trembled in his arms, twisting the grip he had on Quackity’s shirt, pressing himself and his forearms into the younger’s chest. “I didn’t know what to do, Alex.”

“S’okay.” Quackity chuckled sadly. “Neither do I. No one does.” He soothed circles onto Karl’s back. “It’s okay.”

The rarity of receiving a hug from Quackity, itself, had shaved an inexplicable amount of stress off of Karl’s shoulders, but it was in the way Quackity somehow transferred the comfort of his hold through his tone; reassuring Karl without saying too much, but just enough that it eventually calmed him down.



They settled on the couch shortly before Karl eased Quackity into a recapitulation of everything he had missed.

Quackity was the type of person to wear each and every expression on his face. It made it hard for some people to find him approaching; coming off as intimidating and judgemental when he was a sweetheart at his core.

But it also made it ten times worse—delivering the news to him, Karl thought as he watched every crease at Quackity’s forehead or brows, the disgust churning his lips or the eye-rolls.

“Why the fuck weren’t we made aware of this? And a realm going against another realm? Of the *same* Kingdom? Like, what the fuck—”

“To be honest, the king of the realm is to deliver that kind of news. And your king is currently passed out on my bed, *heavily* sedated, so.” Karl tried to make a joke to ease the tension, but the flat tone only made matters worse.

“Holy...” Quackity leaned forward, elbows digging into his parted knees as his next words muffled themselves in his palms. “...mother of *god*.”

“I understand if you need to take a moment to like...process this...” Karl narrowed his eyes on Quackity.

But Quackity never needed time to process things; expressing instead of holding back. “George is in *no* position to fight—are we fucking...kidding?” Karl shut his eyes, knocking his head back against the headrest with a hum of agreement. “And *Metanoia*? I mean,” He pinched the bridge of his nose, sighing out, “Fuck. You know what, actually? That makes a lot of sense for how clingy they fucking are with each other.”

“That...” Karl lulled his head to the side, looking at him. “...no, that might be because they actually love each other, Q.” He chuckled lightly, noticing the immediate cringe in Quackity’s countenance.

“But...the way you told me he acted tonight?”

“Yeah, that’s...a *part* of it—part of their bond. Part of having to let go of Dream, but.” Karl shook his head. “He’s an addict, Alex. *That’s* what made him explode—yearn for it so much. It’s why...” He glanced down at the carpet. “...why I couldn’t just *not* ease him out of it.”

“That shit I said...the ‘killing’ stuff,” Quackity avoided his gaze. Karl suppressed a smile because he knew Quackity never meant any harm by it, still feeling just as bad. “Don’t think that’s what you’re doing. In fact, you’re...I’d say you’re the *one* person saving his life right now.”

Karl snickered, rolling his eyes to the side. “That’s not me. That’s Dream.”

“The *fuck* it is.” Quackity scoffed dismissively. “You know...the butterfly effect bullshit?” An endearing smile stitched Karl’s lips as he nodded. “There wouldn’t be a Dream and George without you, Karl.”

Karl laughed. “Yes, there would, silly.”

“Not to this extent.” Quackity shook his head. “What would’ve happened *without* Metanoia?” Karl’s gaze stuttered on him. “*You* did that for them.”

Karl wasn’t in the right headspace to accept the gratitude, but he knew Quackity was right. Scrunching his nose at him, Karl reached over and squeezed Quackity’s shoulder as a response.

Quackity folded his leg between the two of them. “Did he say nasty shit?” He was referring to George’s breakdown, and as much as Karl didn’t want to be reminded of the instance, it was better than talking about the foreboding battle. He offered Quackity a nod, causing him to briefly look away from Karl. “You know he doesn’t mean it, right?”

“It’s not his words that hurt. It’s seeing him get like *that*. ‘Cause he deserves it the least, you know? It’s why I started getting high with him in the first place.” Karl mindlessly picked at a loose thread of his sweater. “I understood why he wanted to escape this world—a world he was never made for. It...honestly pisses me off that he’s forever locked in this reality.”

Because that’s what made you dependent on the drugs. Not me. And not yourself—not really. It’s

none of our faults.

“It *is* fucked.” Quackity concurred, wrapping his hand around his ankle. “Anthea and literally everyone always praises him for how much of a lover he is, but we’ve sort of overlooked how it’s the one thing that that’s killing him. Shit makes him feel remorse so much worse than any of us. Sends him in an endless cycle of, like, feeling bad and then wanting to forget.”

A lover hits the universe, the universe strikes back.

“He’ll be okay, though, Karl,” Quackity assured softly, receiving Karl’s helpless expression. “You did the right thing, you know? He’ll get better. It’s just a tough time like you said. With all this shit going on, he can’t just quit cold turkey. We just gotta...ease him into it...one step at a time.”

Karl narrowed his eyes on him, a surprising upturn curving his lips. “When d’you get this perceptive, anyway?”

“Learned from the best.” Quackity played with the ring on his forefinger. “He practically raised me, the dumbass.”

Karl tucked his chin, smile growing as he took in Quackity’s own. “He loves you, you know?” Quackity rolled his eyes, pushing down his grin. “*I* love you.”

Quackity chuckled, looking away as he noiselessly mumbled, “Yeah, love you too.”

Karl knew he shouldn’t make a scene out of it—*that’s what George would say*, but he couldn’t help the shit-eating grin forming on his face at the first-ever verbal expression of tenderness he had personally received from Quackity in the years of knowing him.

Karl extended his arms towards him. “Cuddle?”

Quackity scoffed. “Absolutely not.”

Karl *tsk’d*. “Worth a try.”



George’s brain felt like jello when he woke up from Karl’s bed. He couldn’t remember how he got there, but a part of him wanted to say Quackity. And when he stepped out, each step feeling like his ankles were being weighed down by bricks, he saw both Quackity’s and Karl’s heads peeking above the couch.

They were fast asleep, backs pressed on either end of the couch. George lingered on the step that would bring him to them. A big part of him wanted to break down at the sight in front of him because the moment George caught Karl’s sleeping features, everything surfaced.

Prior to the sedation—*that’s what it was*.

That’s what had him stumbling towards the sink as the wooden mug nearly slipped out of his hold. George stared blankly at the water filling the mug, completely zoned out, head empty. It wasn’t until the water overflowed that he switched the tap off, hands shaky as it brought the rim to his mouth.

And it wasn’t until the water assuaged his throat that he realized how cottony his mouth felt. Cotton. That’s what his head brimmed with.

Bricks were his limbs and cotton was his head. George felt *inhuman*.

Which was probably why he *knew* he wanted to cry, especially after noticing how exhausted Quackity and Karl looked—*most* especially when he remembered what he had said to Karl—but he *couldn't* manage tears if he tried.

He couldn't feel shit.

Stepping out of the atelier, hands nursing his mug as the door closed behind him, George walked over to the grass, right underneath a tree where he sat down, back reclined onto the trunk.

He felt like screaming. He felt like thrashing and kicking. He felt like expressing so much, but his energy was *entirely* depleted. The only thing he could feel, at the moment, was the coolness of the water.

“Uh.” A voice spoke from behind him, George felt like he jerked in his seat, but in reality, he managed a slow turn of his head before looking up into greyish blue irises—somehow still bright in the darkness, the lantern from the atelier's porch barely reaching them. “King George?” Sapnap narrowed his eyes on him, shifting on his feet.

George nodded at him, returning his gaze to the grass. *His head felt so fucking heavy, but airy at the same time.*

“What...” Sapnap's voice fluctuated as George imagined him taking in his surroundings. “...what are you doing out here?”

“Don't know.” George hadn't even expected himself to speak; the words automatic, his brain on auto-pilot.

“Fair...enough?” Sapnap awkwardly lingered. “Um...so...”

George found himself looking up at Sapnap again, catching pure confusion etched on the younger's face.

“...Prince Karl around, or?”

“Sleeping.”

“That's—yeah, that's also fair.” Sapnap jutted his chin slightly, scratching his beard.

George *knew* this was awkward, but he couldn't manage words to alleviate the tension.

“It's...do you think you could wake him up—it's just,” Sapnap quickly back-pedalled when George's brows furrowed because, *no, he wasn't going to wake Karl up*. “It's really important.”

“I'll pass it on,” George mumbled.

“Well, you see, that's the thing. I sort of have to tell *him* before I tell *y*—before it gets to you—like, 'cause...” Stammering and stumbling over his words the longer George held his gaze, Sapnap finally let out a deep huff. “...fuck, you know what? Fuck this. I'm just gonna tell you.”

“M'kay.” George veered his gaze back to the ground.

“Are you...are you high right now?”

George blinked at the ground. “I think so.”

“You...you *think*—how do you not know?” George watched Sapnap crouch down in front of him, levelling their eyes. “Are you...*aware*...” He waved his hand in front of George’s face, who stared at him blankly. “...of what is going on at this moment, Your Majesty?” He was annunciating every goddamn syllable and George knew that if he was sober, his patience would be withering away.

“Yes.” George sighed. “I’m aware.”

Sapnap narrowed his eyes on him before letting out a defeated sigh. “Look, Dream has figured out a plan for tomorrow—”

“Dream.” George blindly stated as an uncontrolled realization dawned on him.

“Yeah.” A faint chuckle escaped Sapnap. “You know that guy?” George nodded gingerly. “Trust him, too, right?” Another nod. “Good, ‘cause we need your warriors in on the plan or it’s gonna go south real fucking fast, alright?” There was *something* that Sapnap was continuously saying that slowly pulled George from his drug-addled haze. “Dream told me you overheard the conversation he and I had in the hallway? This morning? Yesterday morning, now.” Sapnap cleared his throat. “So, you know about Dream’s strategy, right?”

It was Dream’s name. That’s what Sapnap was doing in order to lock him into the conversation—reeling him back into their reality—into the severity of the situation.

“Playing dead.” George didn’t know how he knew that, but he said it with confidence, chuffed when Sapnap nodded with a smile.

“Yeah—so, it’s self-explanatory, but when we’re on that battlefield tomorrow, we need your warriors to *act* as if they’re inflicting fatal damage. The keyword here is ‘*fatal*.’ It’s as Dream says, a few scratches and bruises will do the trick—enough so we can see blood and wounds, but just no incurable injuries, ‘kay? Dream and I will inform the Vulcan warriors of the same tactic. We carry this out, make it as believable as possible. Once each and every warrior has fallen, Dream and Sebastian, as well as yourself, will be the only ones standing, alright? You following?” George nodded. “Sebastian will barely intervene during the battle. He’ll most likely wait until it’s just you, Dream and him. *Do not* move from your spot until everyone’s down, okay?”

“There’s no chance Sebastian falls for this.”

“Maybe. Maybe not.” Sapnap shrugged. “But we don’t have much of a choice, at this point.”

George understood, then, why Sapnap wanted this to get out to Karl, first. Dream was worrying, as he always did. Worrying about how George would probably not be able to intake this much information, carry it out and execute it. Because Dream *knew* how out of it he was. *You smelt the liquor off of me*, George winced at his own thought. *I’m sorry*.

“Are you...going to be okay, Your Majesty?”

George flitted his gaze up from the ground, offering Sapnap a hesitant nod. They remained in silence, staring at each other as if they were both trying to reach for *something*.

“Dream cares about you a lot and because Vulcan cares about *him*, you’ve got us on your side.” Sapnap tucked his chin, searching for George’s eyes. “I know you’ve got the security of your own men, but you have ours as well. And we are not going to let anything happen to you, King George.”

Sapnap extended his hand to George, who looked down at it. Soft met rugged and the touch felt as warm as Dream’s. And despite the roughness of his hand, Sapnap held George’s with grace and

gentleness.

After having respectfully shaken his hand, Sapnap retrieved it, but George found himself clutching it in spot. Sapnap's eyes drew up to meet George's, but George looked away out of slight shame.

"Sorry, it's..." George whispered with the quietness of the forest. "...s'just...your hand is as warm as Dream's."

George began pulling away when Sapnap didn't say anything back, for fear of having overstepped and realizing that he'd never touch Sapnap as such. Until the younger re-possessed George's hand just as carefully as he previously had.

George wavered his gaze on him, feeling the temperature rise between their skin as if Sapnap had understood exactly what 'warmth' George referred to; the one that scalded his skin, the fire that seared him awake—that made him feel alive.

Although it wasn't as reviving as Dream's touch, it placed a wedge in George's cravings; the ones that rose since he last felt Dream's grip on his shoulders, where his clasp still ghosted on George's biceps.

Sapnap and George weren't close. In fact, George didn't even realize Sapnap could uphold this kindness; the one that lived in the inclination that had Sapnap brushing the pad of his thumb over George's knuckles.

George's eyes fluttered shut as he let out a quiet sigh, imagining the touch as Dream's. "Is...is he alright?"

Sapnap glanced down at their hands, his thumb continuing in its gentle caress. "You just need to take care of yourself and do as Dream says."

George frowned, an imperceptible squeeze where Sapnap held his hand. "That doesn't answer my question."

Sapnap smiled softly. "If you do those things, it'll give you the answer you were hoping to hear." He bowed his head, gingerly letting go of George's hand as he stood up from the ground.

"Sapnap," George beckoned as Sapnap began heading towards the forest. "Protect Dream, as well. Not just me."

Sapnap chuckled, a slight hang of his head as he easily said, "I would if he needed protection in the first place," He bowed his head once more. "Your Majesty."

When Sapnap left, George clutched the hand where heat began dissipating, only making the warmth dwell down with his own icy touch—but he clutched and clutched because although it wasn't Dream's touch, it was a *piece* of him—delivered through his guard, whose loyalty gave George a shred of hope for tomorrow.



It was the morning of the battle and George was even more depleted than he had been the night before. If it wasn't for the fact that he woke up curled against the tree trunk, George would've thought he dreamt that entire interaction with Sapnap.

But he saw the cicatrice Sapnap left over his knuckles, almost as if he knew the burn would serve as a reminder for the next day. And it had.

Play dead.

George worked every single order given to Sapnap from Dream and he re-worked its deliverance to present to Karl and Quackity—and Niki—who had been the first to find him outside on her way in.

Time felt like it was going by fast because of how tense everything felt, how each piece of information transpired brought the reality of the battle closer and closer to their range.

“Are we sure this is gonna work?” Quackity asked as he disposed of his mug onto the dining table.

Niki hopped off the counter. “Nick said it’s the last resort, right?”

George nodded. He felt like his brain was fuzzy, still, but his withdrawal was creeping in on him. He could tell from the way he would unintentionally snap at Quackity when the younger would ask for rhetorical reiterations.

But mainly when he and Karl would lock eyes every now and then.

Because they still hadn’t talked, one-on-one since last night. Nor did he want to, George thought. Because he felt like he was barely holding himself together, with the thought of Dream, the loss of him and the loss of his high—George was a pinch away from fully breaking apart.

“Okay, well.” Quackity huffed, readjusting his wired headband. “George, we gotta inform the warriors of the plan before collective breakfast starts and—”

“Boys.” Niki beckoned, quietly at first as she slowly brought a hand to her mouth. “Fuck.”

Karl and George looked away from each other again; George diverted his gaze, swallowing the acrid taste of remorse.

Karl cleared his throat, looking at Niki. “What?”

“Who’s gonna...” Niki wrapped her fingers around her throat as if it hurt getting her words out. “...who’s gonna break all of this to Fel and Cole?”

The room fell silent instantaneously.

Karl staggered back into the counter. “I’m gonna be honest...” He locked his fingers behind his neck, looking at each of them through a floored gaze. “...*one more fucking* obstacle and I am about to go *absolutely* mental.”

George felt the same way as he began slipping back into his poisoned subconscious; his soul on its knees, begging and begging to be liberated from their reality that was, at this rate, starting to feel like some *sick fucking* joke.



The silver pearls’ momentum of Newton’s cradle was the only thing heard in Anthea’s office. The three of them stood around George who sat in Anthea’s chair. Four pairs of eyes stared back at Felicity and Cole who occupied the loveseat facing Anthea’s desk; the pair was still digesting the pile of information: Karl finding the battle plan in Sebastian’s office was the starting point.

Karl chewed on the side of his finger. “Mom.” Felicity’s expression was blank as she hummed in response, blue eyes cast over Anthea’s desk. “Say something.”

Felicity barely looked up at Karl before glancing at Cole. She opened her mouth to say something, Cole narrowed his eyes on her, and they both went silent again.

“Look, I understand this is a lot to take in, but *any* sort of sound will do.” Quackity urged impatiently, earning a jut of Niki’s elbow into his arm.

“Fuck’s sake,” Cole muttered.

“F-fuck’s sake?” Quackity echoed, earning Cole’s eyes. “Okay, yes. Fuck’s sake good. Fuck’s sake is expressive, now—”

“I am going to kill the both of you,” Cole spoke through gritted teeth, casting his glare on Quackity and George.

Karl barely had the time to look down at George—who still hadn’t said a word since the four of them left the atelier—when Felicity fixed him. “We don’t keep things from each other.”

“Mom—”

“What the *hell* were you thinking—actually,” Felicity held up a finger at her son. Cole massaged his temples with the pad of his forefingers. “Lovie, you are one of the smartest boys I know, *why* would you sign to that?”

George spoke through a barely audible whisper as he said, “I don’t know.”

“*Why* would you *agree* to a *one-on-one* battle—”

“I don’t *know*.” George raised his voice only slightly through a desperate whine, cowering back in his seat.

“Mom, ease up,” Karl muttered quietly, causing Felicity to let out a small sigh before leaning back in her chair.

“You used to tell me everything,” Cole chimed in, catching his son’s timid gaze through his hung head. “Both of you did.” He glimpsed up at Quackity, who briefly looked away from Cole.

A tense silence passed between familial relations and a bystander who stood as a balance.

“I don’t mean to undermine your anger towards us, but I don’t think this back and forth will be of any use given the dire circumstances.” Niki softly spoke; tender was each word. They all lingered their gaze on her, almost as if she was the only one they wanted to hear from at that moment. “We are laying the ground information that we stupidly excluded you guys from to tell you that Prince Vulcan has figured out a battle plan.”

Cole kept his gaze on his lap, stirring in his seat. “How do we know this is going to work?”

“We don’t.” Quackity cleared his throat, earning the attention of two concerned parents. “But it’s the only strategy that will cause less damage and one that will take Sebastian down.”

“That *bastard*,” Felicity spoke through gritted teeth, shaking her head lightly. “Anthea, Viol—” Her jaw shifted with the faint taste of vermin the realization carried. “He’s a fucking *dead* man.”

Karl drew in his bottom lip, a wave of despair crashing onto him as he watched his mother come to the fruition that she lost two of the women she loved the most, to a man who still walked their grounds.

“I looked dead into his eyes and cried to him about my wife,” Cole had said so quietly that it seemed as if he was speaking to himself. The room fell silent, a pang simultaneously reaching each and everyone’s core. “A death he knew he was responsible for when consoling me.” He veered his teary gaze up to meet the Newton’s cradle. “I want him *gone*.”

Felicity reached over to interlace her fingers with Cole’s before glancing up at Karl. “We’re going to—”

Before she could finish her sentence, a retching sound emitted George’s space. Quackity must’ve been keeping an eye on him because the bin under Anthea’s desk had been quick to rest on George’s lap as he emptied his stomach’s content into the bucket.

Karl’s hand drew up to his mouth. Niki took a step back. Cole was quick to reach his son’s side. Felicity looked from George, then to her son.

It took one lingering gaze from his mother for Karl to hear the muted question. He gave her a nod and she let out a defeated huff, sinking in her seat slightly.

“Breakfast mustn’t have sat well, huh, pal?” Quackity was lying through his teeth for Cole’s sake, painfully smiling down at George as he massaged his shoulder.

And for both George’s and Quackity’s sakes, Cole was too in his head about the truth of his wife’s death to discern the signs of withdrawal jogging back to George after having been momentarily subdued with last night’s sedation.

Cole pushed George’s hair away from his forehead. “At least he made the effort to eat something.”

“I’ll go tell Ana she can start on breakfast?” Niki offered.

“Please, sweetheart.” Cole bowed his head at Niki, receiving her faint squeeze at his arm as she passed by him to exit the study. Allowing Quackity to take the reins on catering to his son, Cole wrapped a gentle hand on Quackity’s shoulder. “Have the warriors been informed?”

“Not yet. You wanna tell them or should I? ‘Cause it’s not gonna be George.”

Karl grabbed some tissues, passing them to George. They locked eyes for a moment. George’s wordless apology was answered with Karl’s reassuring smile.

Dabbing the tissue at the corner of his mouth before tossing it into the bin, resetting it on the ground, George rasped, “I can do it.”

Cole tossed him a look. “George...”

George shot him an unwarranted glare. “I will do it. And I don’t want you to fight. In fact, I don’t want you anywhere *near* the battlefield.”

Cole’s brows furrowed. “I beg your pardon?”

“I’m not risking anybody else’s life—”

“I need to be there, George—”

“*No*,” George growled.

The room went momentarily silent for the umpteenth time.

“I am *begging* you to stay out of it. I *cannot* risk losing you, too, father.” George wavered his gaze on him. “*Please.*”

Cole blinked. Swallowed the plea. And reluctantly abided. Even if in actuality, whether or not Cole agreed, it was George’s decision, as a king, to hand-pick his warriors for the battle.

George looked away from Cole, forcing himself to sit up in his seat before glancing at Felicity. “What were you gonna say before...” He jutted his chin at her.

Felicity broke her telling glare from her son before fixing it on George. “We will be in attendance towards the end of the battle, as we are entitled to that, as the Kingdom’s healers.” George nodded faintly. “We won’t be able to intervene until it’s over, so...hold off on any...” She dawdled her hand, earning another curt nod from George. “...okay.” She nodded firmly, overlooking everyone in the room before returning her attention to George, cocking her head to the side with a relented breath. “Knock ‘em dead, angel-face.”

As they reluctantly filed out of the office, Felicity and Cole were ahead, George stopped in the doorway, almost making Quackity bump into him, causing a domino effect on Karl.

“Quackity,” George beckoned, looking over his shoulder at him.

“Yeah?”

“You’re leading the battle.”

George didn’t pause, didn’t second-guess the thought, leaving his two best friends lingering in the doorway. Quackity turned to face Karl, eyes wide and lips parted. Karl wasn’t sure whether to smile or freak out, but he figured he, too, would have Quackity leading instead of George.

Recycling his mother’s words, Karl attempted through a nervous laugh as he gripped Quackity’s shoulders. “Knock ‘em dead, angel-face.”



The battlefield.

This is it.

George would’ve never imagined himself here; stood at the small hill behind his warriors: all on guard, all set. George would’ve never imagined seeing Quackity on the front line. George would’ve never imagined how steady and confident he felt with his bow.

But most of all, George would’ve never imagined going up against his lover’s realm. Would’ve never imagined being on the opposing side of where he could clearly see Dream leading his men in—where sunshine would cast on green eyes, making for kind smiles and tenderness, Dream’s entire demeanour was enraptured in fire.

There was an agreeable distance between the two realms before it had all begun, but even then, Dream had caught George’s stare—one that felt everlasting, one that temporarily drowned out the noise from around George, one that had him frozen in place when the warriors had already begun to *move*.

This is where it begins,

George had never imagined himself in this situation nor did he expect to find the unravelling scene

as a form of *art*.

Because it was all orchestrated—

Battling blades, grunts, cries all interlaced with the melancholic melody playing off a piano in George's head.

Like a play—

Waiting for the right opening, George let go of his bowstring, purposely missing his shots by a mere inch, scraping the shields of the Vulcan warriors - *reload, a purpose miss after another.*

Play dead.

Warrior after warrior, succumbing to the ground, heads dropping from where George could previously see them. All unfamiliar, except for one; blonde, surging through the opening, calculated jabs of his swords, dodging the silver apexes with every *artful* curve of his body —*Dream was in his element.*

Filing in his last arrow, George found himself blindly raising it in Dream's direction.

A beat.

Vulcan and Salacia warriors animating lifelessness on the battlegrounds. Sebastian stepped over his men. Dream swayed on his footing where George watched him through his bow sight.

A beat.

Sebastian got up from crouching over a body. A smile of malice. A confident step to meet his son's side.

“Not quite the blood bath I expected, I'll be honest.”

The piano melody falls silent.

There's shuffling on the ground, grunts and groans, twists and turns, clanking metal and steel from where warriors squirmed in pain following the hits they *had* to take to seem convincing.

Orchestrated and played out by stunt doubles.

“King George,” Sebastian grinned up at him. “Why don't you come down from there now, huh?”

George flicked his gaze through the bow sight to lock eyes with Sebastian. Ignoring how Dream's chest rose and fell with every heavy breath he released; quavering eyelids like his knees were on the verge of giving out under him.

“Our men have fought it out,” Sebastian dragged the apex of his sword across the dirt, glimpsing down at a fallen warrior of his; tracing their side with the steel before drawing the blade up, pointing it at George. “This is between you and me, right?”

George flicked his gaze back to Dream.

“Don't look at him.” Sebastian chimed in. “He can't help you.”

A beat.

In a flash of a second, deriving from the pits of his core, Sebastian bellowed, “*Come down and kill me yourself.*”

George’s grip tightened on the bowstring.

Orchestrated.

Punz rose and stumbled forward when rising from the ground behind Dream. George caught Sapnap’s glare in an instant: George’s cue.

This is it.

George imperceptibly swallowed, glaring at Sebastian.

This is where it ends.

“Is this the part where you realize that you’ve *royally* fucked up, Your Majesty?” Sebastian twirled his sword in front of him, stepping over his warriors and stopping at the linebreak of the opposing sides.

George looked down at him.

“Because you *know* you can’t kill me?”

A beat.

George slowly lowered his bow, shoulders still tense.

This is where it could all go wrong.

“Maybe I can’t,” George weakly raised his voice.

And bracing himself to witness a side of Dream he’d never seen, George dropped his bow on the ground.

“But your son can.”



It took no more than two steps.

A millisecond where Dream blacked out. A fraction of a second where Sapnap stepped towards Punz when Punz tried to stop Dream. Shuffling of the warriors slowly rose from the ground until they ceased in their spots—until two blades punctured through Dream’s blood: his father and his brother.

Blinking down at where his hand scaldingly gripped his sword, Dream watched the steel sinking into his father’s guts. Volatile eyes, breath stuttering, Dream drew his glare up. Sebastian sputtered, shock-riddled gaze as he stared back at his son.

Dream couldn’t recognize his voice as he said, “This one’s for Anthea,” jutting the blade further in, Sebastian’s blood spat out onto his lips. “*This one’s for mom,*” Pushing it further in until his fist around the handle was flush against his father’s abdomen, “And this one’s for me.” Dream gave the grip a sharp twist, Sebastian’s body jerked against the puncture.

Dream held it there. Not withdrawing his sword, drinking in every inch of his father’s scrunching

features. Not withdrawing his sword, *savouring* the pain corroding his father's countenance the longer his blade fatally lingered.

Looking at him through a gradual lidded gaze as Sebastian's eyes fluttered, slowly falling onto his son's sword, slowly falling to the ground, Dream got as close as he could. Breath of fire scalding his father's bloody lips, Dream whispered, "*Rot in hell*, dad."

It was tense and quiet for so long. So tense and quiet that you could hear the sound of Sebastian's body dropping to the ground, in front of his son, who still clung onto his sword, eyes fixating his father's body as the man remained on his knees, looking up into his heir's gaze.

Dream's jaw clenched. He felt everyone, including himself, hold their breath the longer he and Sebastian held eye contact.

Dream's smile was faint, but noticeable enough when he lifted his foot from the ground to kick Sebastian's chest, having his father fall flat and lifeless on his back.

Another silence passed. The warriors on either realm slowly rose from the ground. George kept his eyes on Dream. Dream finally looked up from his father's body and into his lover's eyes.

George choked on held back tears as he broke into a grin. *Orchestrated*. The sound of Dream's sword hitting the ground was a cue for the rupture of the warriors' cheers.

The ground blurred underneath George as he surged towards Dream, whose steps were heavy from wounds that made themselves more present as George approached, as George lurched into the opened arms of his lover, wrapping them tight around Dream's shoulders.

"You're okay." Dream's voice was almost undetectable in the curve of George's neck, quiet in comparison to the cheers and chatter around them. "George, you're okay."

Dream felt the crash as soon as he faltered in George's hold. The realization of it all. The comedown of a high.

Cradling Dream's face ever-so-gently, George pressed his forehead against his. "*You're* okay." He smiled, locking the bridge of their noses in the softest touch this battlefield *could* witness. "*You're finally* okay, Dream."

Dream wrapped his arms firmly around George's waist, pulling him in like George's comfort was the sole thing keeping him on his feet. "He's gone."

Dream was already mourning. Not because he missed his father. But because now, he would *never* get to experience what could've been, had his father ever truly loved him.

George carded his fingers through Dream's hair, his shoulders crashed onto George's, his blonde head heavy in the curve of George's neck. "I know." He looked over Dream's shoulder during that time, taking in Sebastian's corpse. "I know, Dream."

And unlike his father, Dream *was* a good person. So remorse for having killed Sebastian crept up on him, more than he had expected; shielding his eyes in the crook of George's neck, not wanting to look at his betrayal.

Remorse lingered over his head for no more than a minute as George held him, understandingly.

But unlike his son, Sebastian was *not* a good person. Because although his reign had come to an end, although he was no longer here to pester, no longer here to terrorize those he pretended to love

for his benefit, Sebastian always made sure to have the last word—the last laugh.

Sebastian *always* had a plan B.

“This is cute.”

Plan B was Victoria.

Remorse vanished the moment Dream turned away from George to face her. With every step she took, Dream felt more and more defeated.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Dream threw an arm back, nudging George behind him.

Victoria tilted her head to the side. There was an undetectable emotion behind her smile. Not malice, nor contempt. “Oh, *Clay*,” She stopped in her tracks, waving her fingers as she lifted rocks from the ground; impassive eyes dancing over the minerals. “You know better than to ask stupid questions.” She glimpsed at him with a grin. “Your father, *whom you’ve just killed*,” A vicious glare slipped through her facade, “raised you better than that, no?”

Dream felt the ground quiver beneath him. He looked down before returning his glare to her, repeating, “What the *hell* are you doing here?”

He wondered if the rupture that began to stagger the warriors on their footing, as well as his own, derived from Felicity’s powers or Victoria’s; both women seemingly on guard.

“Simple,” Dream couldn’t even focus on the brainless touch he had initiated to keep George tucked behind him, “You took your father’s life,” to realize that he had lost it. “Now I’m going to take yours.”

It wasn’t until George’s name sounded through Felicity’s, Karl’s, Quackity’s, *and* Sapnap’s screams that it all began making sense. The rupture of the ground derived from George’s powers as he whirled a wave from the body of water that stood yards away.

It all happened too fast. Victoria locking in on George. George moving from behind Dream to graciously step in front of him.

Air against water. *Twelve* spears of crystallized ice surged towards a mustered tornado. Eurus’ wind was too late in shielding the eleven spears that punctured Victoria from head to toe.

Terra and Vulcan, though on the battlefield, were on the sidelines of it. All attention fell to Victoria, fell with her, to the ground.

Dream’s breath was ragged when he snapped out of it.

It all happened too fast.

“George,” Dream breathed out, eyes flicking between Victoria and the top of George’s head.

“George, are you okay?”

Dream barely had time to catch Felicity tending to Victoria when George staggered back in his step.

Dream thought. *You’ve over-exhausted yourself from your powers.* George’s back collided against his chest, Dream’s arms instinctively hooked themselves underneath George’s. *You’ve exhausted yourself.* George brought them down to the ground, Dream’s legs caging his ribs.

Ribs to chest to *stomach—the twelfth spear*.

“G-George?” Dream scrambled to sit up, turning George carefully to pull him onto his lap, not creasing his body for fear that any wrong move would make matters worse. Brain moving a million miles a minute, his hands shaky over the wound, hesitant to touch the ice. “Hey, hey,” He whispered shakily, one arm holding George up slightly by his shoulders, the other cradling his face. “Hey, George?” He searched for his eyes, George looked up at him through a lidded gaze. “Hey, look at me, look at me—”

“Dream...”

“Shh, shh—don’t speak.”

“Y-y-you’re f—”

“Stop, George. It’s okay. It’s okay,” Dream’s eyes frantically drew from the wound and up to umber irises. “Stay with me—*help*,” He barely shouted to Felicity, or Karl, or *whoever*—because although he knew this wound could be easily treated, Dream *couldn’t* think straight, “Look at me, you’re gonna be fine—” with George’s fluttering eyes, lids entering a slow continuum of open and close. “—don’t fucking close your eyes on me, okay? Just—stay, stay with me, okay?”

George’s hands drew up painstakingly, ice meeting fire at Dream’s cheek. Forcing a smile, George sputtered out, “I did it.” He breathed out. “You’re...free, Dream.”

Defiant, defeated, drowning in George’s paling features, Dream shook his head. “Not...” His breath stuttered, tears peppering George’s skin. “...not without you, George—I love you,” He held George’s face up when his head began to slouch. “I *love* you, do you hear me?”

George winced when he nodded, “Love you...” *barely audible*, but breaking into a tearful grin as he said, “...my King.” his hand slipping from Dream’s face, idle in his lap.

Dark honey disappeared behind heavy eyelids. “No,” Dream dropped his forehead onto George’s chest. “No. Please.”

Defeated. Defiant. Drowning.

“Stay with me—stay—I love—love you, George—please...”

A rush of fire surfaced after the loss of calming waters.

Dream’s head snapped up as he reeled a breath, overlooking the battlefield for *anyone*. *Every spoken syllable*—shot through his utmost core as he screamed, “*Help*,” *over and over and over again*—

as George grew gradually heavy in his arms.

Chapter End Notes

tatataaaaa.

rip metgeorge ig /jjjjjjj
im yolkin, pullin ya leg

don't panic and certainly don't forget that tag about the beloveds. just a lil bit drama and spice as i do. next chapter should be half portion of angst. max. and then everything after that should be just dandy. proooooomise promise promise

ok see ya and treat yourselves **real fucken good** or im
gatekeeping the fluff chapters fr this is a threat drink some wotah or sum. may
crack open a crispy-ass monster, have some tea, topped off with ur fave snack? dunno,
whatever your heart desires, whatever ur into. i've recently been indulging in croffles ?
(like a waffle, but a croissant. i usually have the nutella and banana one.) i personally
cant remember the last time i had a drop of water in my body but that is to premise that
i have been testing out monster flavours and i recommend that you Do Not drink the
gold kind. it tastes like *piss* but make it TV static.

anyway, lil bit of lore for ya there!

but serious. thank u for dealing with the angst. ur great. i appreciate u. two more to go
! x (:

I Feel Real

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Why did you tell me you were scared?

“Dream, honey, he’s gonna be fine. You just need to let me take him, okay?” Felicity’s voice begged itself through the replaying memory,

“Because I felt like I was going to die.”

after George came down from how he acted in Violette’s study.

But you’re not scared of that.

After Metanoia.

“Karl, help me lift him.”

“No, but I’m scared of losing you.”

“Karl, *dude*,” Quackity’s voice boomed at Dream’s side.

“I thought I was going to die, leave you behind before making sure you were free.”

“Karl, where the *fuck* are you going?”

“Leave him. He’s in shock. Just...help me, Alex.”

Making sure I was free.

“I did it.”

“Dream?”

“You’re free, Dream.”

“C’mon, bro.” A steely grip helped Dream up to his feet. He didn’t even get the time to discern Sapnap. His mind elsewhere, watching George, lifeless in Felicity’s and Quackity’s arms as they carried him out of the battlefield. “Are you hearing me?”

Dream blinked. “What?”

Sapnap stepped in front of him, blocking his view from George. *That’s when he snapped out of it.*

“Get out of my way, I need to—”

“You need to take a moment to breathe, Dream—”

“I need to be with him—”

“And you *will* be.” Sapnap firmly gripped Dream’s biceps. “But a *lot* of shit just happened and

you're not processing anything—”

“I *can't*—”

“You need to relax—”

“*Don't tell me to fucking relax, Nick.*”

When he finally locked eyes with Sapnap, not having the energy to battle out of his grip, Dream let out a weighty breath before breaking into a fit of tears.

“I know, man.” Sapnap pulled Dream into his arms, “I know—c'mere,” curling a hand at the back of Dream's head, “you're fine.” gently laying it on his shoulder, “You're good.” as Dream held onto him for dear life.

For having lost a father before the possibility of witnessing his redemption. For having lost a lover just before freedom became *theirs*. For having lost a sibling—who had the potential of being as loyal as the brotherly grip Sapnap had on him whilst hot tears drenched blood-stained fabric.

Sapnap continued his attempts to comfort Dream, assuring him that George was going to be okay. That Felicity had cured worse wounds before. Dream *wanted* to let Sapnap's words in; allow them to alleviate his never-ending nerves as they walked from the battlefield to Terra.

But with Dream's luck—or lack thereof—it wasn't that easy.

According to Felicity, Karl had given George a sedative the night prior; one that was still coursing through George's bloodstream. *According to Felicity*, from how Dream metabolized her words, *the contents of the sedative were going to work against the healing process.*

Where Dream had a bit of faith in Sapnap's consolation, it was all lost with Felicity's return from George's room.

“Can I see h—be with—can I be with him?” Dream *barely* asked Felicity, already attempting to move past her.

“Honey, look at me,” A warm hand reached his forearm, scarcely bringing Dream down from his frenzy. “It's not going to do you *any* good being in there—”

“Can I please just look at him? Please—Felicity, I just—” Dream swallowed the urge to burst into tears when Felicity's brows began to draw together; noticing the glossiness of his eyes. “...just need to be with him.”

Felicity looked over her shoulder to the ajar door before returning a sorry gaze to Dream. A clutch at Dream's arm, Felicity soothed, “Go home. Shower it off—”

“I just wanna see him...” Despair leaked through Dream's whisper where it hurt Felicity in the flinch of her countenance.

“Home, Dream.” Felicity gently urged, but with enough vehemence in her tone to momentarily bring Dream down to earth. “It's in my hands and I will *not* give up until he is *well*.”

Dream's eyelids flapped shut at the reiteration that George *wasn't* well. Not that he'd forgotten, but the reminder that there was now an obstacle in the treatment that would've already had him awake had him looking to the side, away from Felicity to shield his tears.

“I *promise* I’ve got him.” Felicity clutched his jacket, giving it a light tug. “Go.”

Felicity moved before Dream did, the door to George’s room shutting behind her, Quackity and Cole. Rising worries weighed down on Dream’s shoulders as he walked down the hallway, down the stairs, past the portal, through the village, and into Vulcan—*like a ghost*.

Entering the palace, lingering in the vacant foyer—*quiet*. A realm that didn’t carry the essence of a won battle. More so, a loss. Because Dream lost the one and only thing—person—he cared about; making for a quiet reign, one that felt like he was still shackled in chains—*unfulfilled* and *empty*.



Dream searched for fresh clothes after a shower he didn’t recall taking.

This emptiness continued to sit with him until it didn’t. Until his frantic hand blindly clutched a white, silky button-up. Until the whiff of pine hit him. Until the sweet mint kissed his bare skin as it did that night, that morning, that afternoon—until George’s scent sunk him into wintry waters.

For the first time ever, Dream missed the feeling of being held. He missed the soul-clad hug George had given him after the altercation between Quackity and Sapnap.

Dream thought he could call for Sapnap.

And Dream thinks he wants to do that when he’s clutching the dresser so hard he’s scared he’s going to burn the oak.

Dream thought he could call for Sapnap but deep down he knew it wouldn’t suffice. Dream thought, in his most vulnerable moments, he would feel safest being held by family. By blood.

But mom’s dead. So is dad. And so is Punz.

And Dream’s alone.

And not because he lost his family. Dream knew he lost them a long time ago.

He’s alone because every second he’s not looking into the dark honeyed eyes of his lover, he’s closer to losing George, too.

And Dream *cannot* lose George.

Because if the thought alone had him internally screaming in unendurable pain, he didn’t want to think of the person he would become. Or the part of him he would lose if he lost George.



“Dream?”

Blinking his eyes open, Felicity and Cole were staring down at him entirely perplexed.

Knowing Felicity advised against him being inside the room where George was being treated, Dream decided to stay in the hallway. Next to the closed door. Back pressed against the wall, sleep had eventually stolen him from being mentally and physically depleted.

“What are you doing out here, lovebug?”

Dream palmed his eye to rid the sleep from it. “You said I shouldn’t go inside and I...didn’t—

couldn't stay home, so." He deflected his gaze to the ground before slowly rising to his feet. "How's he doing?"

Felicity proffered a quiet smile. "Better."

"Is he awake?"

"No, but...we're getting there."

Dream glanced at Cole, who had been silent during this exchange. "Sir, I'm so sorr—how are you feeling—ah, that's a dumb question—I—"

A gentle clasp warmed his shoulder; Cole's touch stole the remaining stutters from Dream as he said, "Dream—is it alright if I call you Dream?"

Dream bowed his head. "Of course, sir—"

"Cole will do," He reminded Dream with a respective bow of his head in return.

"Are—are you—"

"I'm alright." Cole gave his shoulder a gentle squeeze, glancing at Felicity who hid her smile to the ground. "As I trust that my *son* will be alright. I'm not worried."

Dream doubted that a tad bit.

It wasn't that the statement contradicted the prior, but Dream could tell that worry could coexist with the ease Cole currently wore on his expression. Worry for the sheer possibility that things could *still* go wrong. That he could still lose his son after having just accepted the truth behind his wife's death.

"You shouldn't be either, Dream."

Dream wondered how he did that; sported sorrowful eyes and tired features, but a reassuring tone nonetheless. He wondered the same about Felicity, who had been battling to keep George afloat while also dealing with the possibility that if all failed, she would take the blame—*she seems like she would*.

Felicity asked her question with a tilt of her head, "Would you like to see him, love?"

Dream immediately snapped out of his thoughts, giving an eager nod. "Please."

It's shut eyelids, faint breaths, pale skin, bandages and bruises over a fair complexion that didn't look right when tainted with the effects of something as ugly and rough as a battle—but all of that had Dream unable to keep back his tears.

It's the realization of how much different he viewed George from everyone else. Because Dream had seen his warriors and others in much more critical care than George and yet the *smallest* wound on George would send Dream's brain into overdrive.

A stifled sob burst past his lips as he buried his face in his hands, shoulders drawn up to his earlobes as he trembled in his spot. Dream staggered back on his footing, his calves hitting the edge of the ottoman before he fell into the seat. Digging his elbows into his parted knees, Dream forced himself to peek past the cracks of his fingers and winced at the sight of George through his cloudy gaze.

Felicity took the vacant seat at his right as Cole went to occupy Dream's left. A delicate touch wedged itself in the hook of Dream's elbow. "He'll be okay."

Dream shook his head, squeezing his eyes shut before returning them in the shield of his hands.

"He'll be alright." Cole's voice soothed in with Felicity's dwelling words. "It's a wound that he can most definitely handle."

Dream's voice muffled itself in his weeping palms as he said, "He shouldn't have to."

Felicity withdrew her hand from Dream's elbow to place it onto his shoulder blade, drawing circles into the silky fabric of his white dress shirt. "He went to battle, Dream. All of this was expected."

Dream grimaced, shaking his head, fully defiant. Slowly drawing his hands from his face before letting them idly dangle off his knees, Dream spoke to the ground out of shame, "I'm so sorry, Cole."

Cole leaned forward slightly, barely in Dream's peripheral. "Why's that?"

"Your son took a hit that was meant for *me* —"

"Did you ask him to?"

"No, I-I didn't even know he was gonna do that—I didn't know he *could* do that."

"So, why are you blaming yourself for something that my son did on his own accord?"

Dream blinked at the ground before forcing his gaze on Cole, receiving a lop-sided smile; warm and soft.

Dream frowned, the approaching statement acrid on his tongue. "Because he wouldn't have had to make that decision if it wasn't for my father's backup plan—for my father in general. He's the root of every ultimatum George has had to take in the past weeks—and it's not...it's not..." He looked away from Cole.

"It's not you, Dream." Cole coolly stated. "You are not your father and your father is not you." Dream drew his blurry eyes to George's resting body, "Don't blame yourself." Cole continued gently, slowly altering Dream's perception of George's state: *peaceful slumber over looming death*. "Surely you're not still carrying his crimes on your back? You've taken him down, remember?" He chuckled sadly, and Felicity joined in just as lightly. "*There's* a good thing, yeah? You don't have to serve him anymore, son."

Felicity giggled warmly, drawing a hand up to Dream's nape. "You okay, my love?"

Dream shook his head, merciless tears tainting his flushed cheeks.

"S'alright." A blithe sigh escaped Cole, "That is also okay."

Dream's hand flew to cover his eyes as an unfamiliar feeling rose within him following a medley of Felicity's and Cole's words. Especially when Cole's hand met Felicity's at Dream's nape, causing an insuppressible urge within Dream to simply fall into Cole's side.

And that unfamiliar feeling rose and rose when Cole swiftly pulled him in, an arm draped around Dream, hand shielding Dream's head onto his shoulder. Felicity's weight leaned onto Dream's back where she rested her head, continuing the caresses of her hand over his shoulder blades.

“I think when things get this overwhelming,” Tears stained Cole’s neck as Dream silently sobbed, allowing his words to comfort. “It’s easiest to put the blame on ourselves,” Dream felt Felicity’s arms snake around his waist, causing him to reach for her forearms, clutching them just as tightly as Felicity held him. “But feeling sorrow is enough of a punishment, you don’t have to add onto that. Especially when all of it is undeserving, to begin with.”

Dream couldn’t halt his defiling vulnerability with Felicity’s and Cole’s nurture; their hushes, denying his need to over-apologize. Touches he’s never felt from his father, or missing from his mother when he needed her care and attention the most.

Dream felt like he could shatter into a million little pieces because Cole was holding him like Sebastian *should* have instead of threateningly pointing swords. And Felicity hushed against his clothed spine, brushing her thumbs over Dream’s forearms in a sentiment Sebastian’s fingers never knew when they dug into Dream’s neck on his birthday—*birthdays*.

For the first time since having left that battlefield, Dream felt a shred of that freedom George had mentioned. And he was finding it in the people that completed George—the people that stood for the kindness and warmth he was missing earlier in his bedroom—the tenderness he never knew he needed but knew existed in George, who would soon come back to him.

Because you have to come back to me, George.

Wake up.

A

Niki jogged down the staircase, heels of her platform boots smacking each slab of marble. She barely noticed the person walking past the doors of the Eurys palace until two familiar hands gripped her forearms, whirling her around.

“Hey—oh my god, have you seen my mother? I feared she might’ve gone to the battle, but...” Allowing herself a few more seconds to drink in Quackity’s features, Niki’s own went stagnant as she stilled in Quackity’s grip.

“I’m so sorry,” Quackity whispered shakily. “She’s...she’s not coming back, Niki.”

Silence encompassed them. Stuffing the foyer with a dense tension. Niki faltered under Quackity’s hesitant touch. Silence encompassed them. Niki couldn’t manage tears if she tried. Either from shock, elation, confusion—too many things were left unanswered and unseen from her perspective that she didn’t know the next thing to say. Didn’t know the right thing to say.

A solid fifteen minutes had passed before Quackity sensed that she was ready to talk. He almost always knew when.

“How do you feel?”

Niki was sat across from him on the bench they retrieved for physical support. “Is George...gonna be okay?”

“According to Felicity, yeah.”

Niki nodded, working around every word, every sentiment attached to it, digesting it—moving onto the next—as Quackity guided while she was dead silent minutes prior. “And you can’t find Karl?”

Quackity shook his head, offering a small shrug. “But he’s probably blowing off some steam.”

“Karl doesn’t blow off steam. He blows puffs of his joints.” Niki shot him a sly look.

Quackity chuckled before a tense stillness encircled them once more.

“They’ll be okay, Niki. Fel and Cole, as well.”

Niki constricted his eyes on him. “And you? Are you okay?”

Quackity clicked his tongue. “Cole told me I have to pretend I am until George wakes up. Just so we’re not beating ourselves up. More than we already are.”

Niki reeled her stare over sorrowful features; the twinge of hope aiding the frail uplift of his complexion. “Hey, if Fel said George is gonna be okay, then...I trust that he will be.”

Quackity reached over for her hand. “Will you be?”

Niki brainlessly interlocked their hands. “I mean...she’s no longer here to terrorize me anymore.” She offered a powerless smile, earning a sympathetic one from Quackity. “But...” She swallowed, eyebrows pinched. “...she wasn’t all bad, you know? And...I mean, I don’t think I could ever really mourn someone like her. Or, actually, I think I *have* been in mourning my whole life.” She ran her free hand through her hair. “Anyway, when I’ve really, properly sat with it...I think I’m just gonna feel the anger part of whatever grief I’ve been feeling for her.”

“Can I say something?”

“Yes, of course.”

Quackity glimpsed up at her. “I’m...personally? I’m glad she’s no longer in your life, Niki.” A small tug at the corner of her lips and Niki was pointing the faint smile at their hands. “You’re gonna be a great Queen, princess.”

The two of them allowed their smiles to progress in their frail solace.

“Hey, promise me something?” She tilted her head. Quackity readily nodded. “When I become Queen, will you keep calling me princess?”

Quackity grinned at her. “Promise.”

Niki wrapped her arms around Quackity. “Thank you for everything.” She purposefully annunciated each syllable, “I love you.” knowing very well, Quackity would return the three words with the gradual squeeze of his embrace.



When the door to the healing room swung open, Dream was expecting to see Felicity and Cole with Karl in tow, but he was met with Quackity.

The tension that clad them was instantaneous.

Quackity cleared his throat. “Um. Where’s...Cole and Fel?”

“Out looking for Karl.”

Quackity imperceptibly nodded. They both looked away from each other.

Dream hadn't realized Quackity was still in the room until he felt his own puffer jacket being tossed onto his lap. "Alright," Quackity ushered with a clap of his hands. "Let's move, dog boy."

Dream's brows knitted. He was so sleep-deprived that everything was moving slowly, not mediating with the urgency in Quackity's tone.

"What?" Dream asked, voice hoarse.

"We're going to the pub."

"I don't drink." Dream quickly dismissed, placing his jacket at his side.

Quackity sighed, leaning his shoulder against the doorframe. "Then order a glass of water or some shit—fuck if I care. Let's roll."

Dream shook his head. "I'm staying with George."

"Dude," Quackity pinched the bridge of his nose. "Staying here isn't gonna do anyone any good. He'll wake up on his own." Dream narrowed his eyes on Quackity. "Do *not* make me drag your ass out of here 'cause I *will*."

"Why do you wanna drink with me, anyway?"

"Karl's getting fucked up somewhere. Niki is at home...kinda, sort of mourning? And my drinking partner is in a coma. So," Quackity nodded his head at the exit. "You're my only option."

"You could drink alone—"

"Misery loves company or some shit—let's *move*, dog boy—do I need to whistle?" Dream rolled his eyes, getting up with a huff—*because in a way, though he would never vocally admit, Quackity was right*. "Throw you a bone?" Dream shot him a glare, walking towards him. "Lure you out of here with treats?" Quackity pushed himself off the doorframe, smirking at Dream who wholly ignored eye contact. "Squeaky toys?"

Dream muttered, "*Please* stop talking." shrugging on his puffer jacket as he slid past Quackity.



"You ever wonder why we hated each other the minute we started talking?" Quackity asked with a slurred tongue.

The village pub, following a battle, was always packed to the brim. The only time it wasn't was when Anthea was pronounced dead. Dream would never forget that day: how the village, the courtyards of every realm, and every commonly populated area, had turned into a ghost town.

Quackity had ordered a total of six drinks since having sat down and had finished draining his seventh before he finally turned in his seat to face Dream.

Dream was watching, eyes riddled with concern and surprise until the question slipped past the younger's drunken tongue. "What?"

"Do *you...ever...wonder...why*—"

"Okay. Fuck." Dream waved him off with a roll of his eyes. "God, you're insufferable."

Dream was usually good at measuring his composure around people that pushed his buttons, but

with the addition of the blaring music, the plethora of drunk people around them, and Quackity being the natural pest he was, everything was irritating him. Especially when all Dream wanted was to stay by George's side.

Quackity drunkenly grinned. "I *know*—anyway, do you ever wonder?"

"I do not wonder a single thing about you, Alex."

"Likewise. But I've been thinking about it and it all started making sense after Karl told me about that Metanoia thing," Dream caught Quackity's knowing smile as he winantly continued, "George's your anchor, isn't he?"

Dream wasn't sure of the correlation, so he offered a half shrug. "Yeah?"

Quackity's smile faded as he deflected to the counter. "Well, then, that would be why."

Dream thought that Quackity might be talking out of his ass due to slit eyelids; heavy with liquor. But as he allowed himself to drink in his words, it slowly began making sense. Through years of studying the intricacies of relations within the Kingdom, there was a possessiveness and over-protection that came with the anchor's possessor.

So, when it came to sharing an anchor, "Fuck," Dream exhaled, locking eyes with Quackity when he finally looked up from his empty drink. "He's yours, too."

Quackity's eyebrows shot up, wordlessly confirming Dream's realization.

A shitty guitar riff coursed through the speakers, a cheer followed by a rupture of laughter was heard around them. Everyone was blind to the weighted conversation happening at the heart of this pub where Dream and Quackity sat.

"I guess now I feel less shitty admitting that..." Quackity straightened in his seat, leaning his forearms into the table before looking at Dream. "...that the moment I saw George take the hit for you, I wanted nothing more than to plunge my sword into your fucking guts." Dream blinked in his words, watching the ice lace Quackity's glare. "There was nothing more I wanted, at that moment, than to see you die." Dream's eyes fluttered down to the table, swallowing the bile that rose in his throat. "But," Quackity let out a heavy exhale, "It wasn't your fault. I guess."

Whatever anger and irritation lay within Dream since being forced into this conversation, into this pub, dissipated the longer he watched Quackity—*saw* him: a brother to the fallen, hurt riddling his core as he pretended to seem 'okay.'

"I'm sorry, Alex."

Quackity's gaze flew to Dream's.

"It's killing me," Dream began, catching Quackity's accentuated jawbone when he gritted the apology in between his teeth. "So, I know it's gotta be killing you, too."

Because although everyone who was connected to George was going through hell the moment they witnessed him fall to the ground, Dream and Quackity concurrently shared a different, but similar connection in terms of the pure agony that came with the hurt of their anchor.

Quackity rolled his eyes away from Dream with a shake of his head, muttering, "Whatever, dog boy. Don't think this makes us pals."

Dream found himself smiling at that; the decline of peace on the account of letting people in. He saw a twinge of Sappnap behind avoidant coffee-coloured eyes, as well as a piece of himself.

Going along, but making sure to add lightness to his tone, Dream scoffed, “Who the fuck said I wanted to be your *pal*, anyway?”

Quackity quickly looked at Dream before looking away, stifling his smile by sucking in his cheeks.

Another boisterous silence sat between them.

Quackity huffed. “You really don’t drink?”

Dream clicked his tongue. “Don’t like the taste of it. Don’t like how it makes me feel.”

Quackity jutted his bottom lip as he nodded slowly. “Good.”

And Dream instantaneously knew that ‘good’ stemmed from the only thing that tied the two of them together.



George woke up with the sun shining a red curtain over his eyelids. He blinked his eyes open to be met with Dream’s sunlit hair, bare broad shoulders that rose and fell with every quiet breath.

The ray of sun peeking past the curtains cast a glint on the ring around his finger when he reached for Dream’s shoulder.

Dream turned over, sleep slitting his eyelids that cinched at the corners with his lazy smile. He had captured George’s hand at some point, where he placed a gentle kiss and spoke against the fair skin. George watched their fingers interlace, the faint clink of their rings sounding through their contented sighs.

The door to their bedroom burst open, two heads peeking just above their mattress before a weight hopped onto them. Surprised laughter dwelled in with playful screams as a little girl settled on Dream’s lap, the smaller boy nestling in George’s barricading arms. Slow mornings with nonsense babblings of innocent voices that warmed both Dream’s and George’s hearts as they caught glimpses of each other, beaming grins on their faces.

A chorus of eager yells too loud for anyone to find enjoyable sounded like the most beautiful composition to George. And Dream, it seemed, when the pair hung off him as if he were a monkey bar—mop of blonde curls dangling off Dream’s back as he gently threw his daughter over his shoulder, the plushness of dark chocolate nestling in Dream’s neck as Dream’s arm secured pudgy legs that barely wrapped his side.

A sight that felt like home, slipping a tear down George’s cheek that rose him from his dream.

A dream.

George was in immediate pain when he attempted to wake up. Alarmed—as the last thing he remembered was the puncture of an ice spear through his stomach. He glimpsed down where the pain was eating him alive and was instantly met with a mop of blonde hair resting inches above his bandaged wound. Blonde—not like the soft curls in his dream—but the pigment of which they were inherited from.

Dream.

George let out a small sigh, eyes droopy from what he assumed was the healing remedies Felicity had used. Everything was slowly coming back to him as he glimpsed around the room: *Karl's atelier, the comedown, the talk with Sapnap, with Cole and Felicity, the battle, Sebastian's death, Victoria's death, and his own—in a way.*

George left the brightness of his subconscious to be brought back into the darkness of this room; barely illuminated in the orange hue of the evening Terran sky.

Not knowing what to do, suffering a recovering wound with medication that barely assuaged the pain, George cradled Dream's head before hugging it to his stomach.

Seconds before George was sure the lights would never turn back on, he experienced contradicting happiness.

He was ecstatic to leave this world.

In retrospect, George felt he was doing everyone around him a favour by leaving, despite how much they would dispute it. But before that fatal puncture sunk him into what he always desired, George saw the pain in every inch of Dream's face; etched with the gradual understanding of the possibility that George was leaving him for good. And a fraction of a second before it was too late for either him or Dream to do anything, George realized he *didn't* want to leave him.

George had told Dream prior to that moment that he didn't want to leave until he made sure he was free from his father, but George, at this point in time, after everything that had taken place, didn't want to leave Dream point-blank.

Which was a mind-stunning revelation; for having gotten a taste of what he had been craving since he was sixteen, and realizing the like of it couldn't compete with Dream.



It was the eye-bags and the dark circles in Dream's face that had George stepping out of bed as stealthily as he could when his bladder was pressing him for the toilets.

When returning from the bathroom, George found Dream in absolute shambles; pacing and tugging at his hair as he muttered something under his breath before he caught George in his peripheral.

Their breaths caught in their met gaze.

The corner of George's lips slowly drew up. "Hi." He quietly said.

Dream looked like he was going to reply, lips parted and breath held until his mouth drew close with a quiver. *And Dream broke.*

George had seen him cry before. George held him when Dream was unable to cease his tears. *But this*—Dream's hand quickly drew up to his face as he audibly sobbed and George didn't waste a second before stalking towards him.

"Oh my god, Dream," George was brought into his embrace before he, himself, could initiate it. And whatever pain lingered in every movement he made with his body, George chose to fully ignore after finally being able to hold and be held by *him*. "Oh my god—hi, hey—I'm here—"

"You're not." The effects of sleep deprivation worked their way through the desperation of

Dream's tone as he reiterated, "You're not real."

"I'm here. I'm real." George pushed down his tears, forcing a smile so Dream could hear it from where he kept his face hidden in the curve of George's neck. "This is real." He carded his fingers through Dream's hair, noticing the immediate slouch of Dream's shoulders under the weight of his arms.

"Please tell me you're here."

"I am, Dream." George pushed down the pain of Dream's muscles digging into his wound.

"This isn't real—"

"Dream," George chuckled sadly, being pulled back into Dream's arms the second he attempted to pull away. "Look at me and you'll know."

Dream's arms relaxed a smidge around George's waist. George knew his heart would shatter the moment he caught teary green eyes, but he broke into a grin when he watched Dream taking *all* of him in.

"Yeah?" George tilted his head, cradling Dream's face gently. "This real?" Dream didn't respond, eyes fluttering shut as tears continued to roll down his cheeks. "No?" Dream debauched in the touch of George's caressing thumbs. George leaned up on his tip-toes, pressing a chaste kiss onto the salty skin. "This?" He whispered, earning a shaky sigh in response. George brought his lips to the bridge of Dream's nose, placing another temperate kiss. "If this isn't real..." Dream squeezed George's waist like the touch pained him, despite leaning into George's kisses, "...how would I know..." tugging George against him, jerking a smile at George's lips, "...that you like to be kissed..." George dragged each word through brushing lips up to Dream's eyebrow, "...right..." He hushed against the arch before pressing a feather-light, lingering kiss, "...here." revelling at the effect it had on Dream when he faintly whimpered at the feel.

George pulled back a bit just so he could press their foreheads together. Dream's tear slipped onto George's prominent cheekbones as George swayed them—sort of like he was gently rocking the panic from Dream, delicately hushing through kisses placed on specific spots of Dream's face —*spots that derived soft noises which spoke for his gradual ease.*

As he soothed Dream back to reality, George wondered how the fragile man in his arms could be the same person who plunged a sword into his father during battle. As Dream cried onto his shoulder, *pulling* him in, George wondered how he had gotten so undeniably lucky to come back to *this—to Dream.*



When Dream had finally been coaxed out of his mental hell, he debriefed George on everyone's whereabouts. The worry of no one knowing where Karl was transposed onto George alongside the crippling remorse he had felt since waking up; Karl being the first person he wanted to make amends with.

Dream offered to go fetch the others, but George had asked for a bit more time before being ambushed with all of that affection. And knowing very well he'd have to confront five different people about five different things.

"Uh, George, I don't know if you should be—"

George winced as he sat up against the headboard, lightly clutching the fabric of his shirt, feeling

the bulge of his bandaged stomach. “M’fine.”

“I just—”

“Dream,” George shot him a light glare as he steadied his back against the pillow. “I’m fine.”

Dream returned a similar glare, settling down before George. “Just don’t want you to pop the stitches.”

George playfully rolled his eyes. “Are you my nurse or my boyfriend?”

Dream ceased in his spot, staring back, alarmed. George, then, realized that they’d never openly used the term with each other.

For having surprised himself, George should’ve been just as taken aback, but instead stifled a laugh. “Shit. I mean...I’m not taking it back—”

“No, I don’t want you to—”

“I know, but—”

“I just never heard you—”

“Yeah,” George concluded for the both of them, ending their misery. “I know.”

Dream pointed his bashful grin to the bedsheets. “I’ll have you know a boyfriend would be just as worried, if not more than a nurse would.”

George lightly threw his hands up. “Oh, that’s *my* bad.” He mimicked Dream’s accent from when he’d playfully shot those words back at George, earning a fond shake of Dream’s head in return.

George held Dream’s hand in his own, noticing the difference in size; something that has always captivated him since the first time their hands touched.

“You okay?” George quietly asked, flitting his gaze up to meet Dream’s. “About...Sebastian?”

His father’s name struck Dream like a realization. Like something that hadn’t really been on his mind; a bittersweet reminder causing a mere tug at Dream’s lip as he offered a weak shrug.

“He had to go.”

George’s jaw shifted as the words dallied on his tongue. “You’re...allowed to feel sad, Dream. Angry, even—you’re allowed to feel everything.”

Dream concurred. “I do. Feel everything.”

George pursed his lips as he nodded. “You miss him?”

Dream’s features scrunched up in a quick reject. “No, but,” He brushed his thumb over George’s knuckles. “I’ll miss fantasizing about what he could’ve been. The father I could have had.”

George squeezed his hand. “And...your brother?”

Dream’s grip loosened around George’s hand, thumb coming to a slow halt. “Um.” He briefly looked away. “Yeah...that one...I don’t know. Feel like I fucked up. Feel like...” His tongue slicked his lips. “...my mom would’ve been pissed—*is* pissed at me for not...giving him a second

chance.”

George watched the unwarranted guilt return in Dream’s expression: *always afraid of having let people down in situations out of your control*.

“But,” George straightened up in his seat slightly. “What do *you* think?”

Dream looked at him, the thought whirling past his head, dripping off his tongue with ease. “I think he was past salvation.”

Although George was completely mangled the night Punz fetched him from the pub, he remembered his natural instinct to follow Dream’s. Because he *trusted* Dream’s gut as much as he did his own.

“Then I think you’re right,” George said with just as much ease.

Dream mindlessly asked, “You think so?”

“You’ve got a good instinct, Dream. You should trust it.” George smiled reassuringly. “I know I do.”

A similar upturn reflected onto Dream’s lips. “I’m glad you’re here.” Their smiles progressed as George brought their interlocked hands to his mouth where he pressed a gentle kiss. Dream leaned forward, nudging the tips of their noses before returning the gesture, “I was going crazy without you.” their skins brushing with every hushed word, “I missed hearing you talk, laugh...” George brought a hand to Dream’s face, curving it around his cheek. “...I missed seeing you—all of you—I love you.” He blurted out, shamelessly, wholeheartedly. “I love you so much, George—god, I thought I was never gonna get to say it. Thought I was gonna lose you before I *got* to say it—you heard me, right?” Dream leaned away slightly, a frantic look on his face. “On the battlefield?”

“Yes, but...” George chuckled, brushing his thumb over Dream’s cheekbone. “...Dream, that wasn’t the first time you said it.”

Dream’s eyes flicked up from George’s lips where they temporarily zoned out. “What?”

George giggled. “First time you said it was in your sleep. I wasn’t sure who you were talking to, but you began with my name, so.” He shrugged. “Figured it was meant for me.”

“It was.” Dream nodded fervently. “Always you—”

“I know,” George’s free hand met the untouched side of Dream’s cheek, skimming his words against Dream’s parting lips, “My golden boy.” Dream fell into his touch, into the term, slowly leaning his forehead against George’s shoulder. “And I, you, Dream.” He whispered against Dream’s temple. “I love you like I’ve never loved anyone before.” He continued, running his fingers through blonde threads for the exact sigh that was coursed out of Dream from the touch. “I love you as my first and my last.”

A brief moment of sweet caresses and intervallic kisses on their bodies passed before George constated something.

Passing his hand over the silky white fabric Dream sported, a smile corroded George’s lips. “You’re wearing that shirt.”

Dream placed an imperceptible kiss on George’s collarbone. “Smells like you.”

George caroused at the touch, playing with the ends of Dream's hair as they continued to linger in each other's arms.

"You know, before I woke up, I had this dream..." George shifted in his position, causing Dream to do the same. "...it was, um—sort of...weird."

"Yeah? How so?"

"Well...firstly, it was set in this...like, different universe. I don't know. Just didn't feel or look like we were in the Kingdom."

"We?"

"Yeah. Us, two."

"Now, I'm really invested."

"Course you are."

"Carry on."

"So, we were waking up, and um." George immediately stopped when the ring popped into his memory. He realized how flustered he must've looked when Dream perked against him, lifting his chin up slightly.

"What?"

"Um," George cleared his throat. "Think we were...you and I were married."

Dream froze for a split second before a smile cracked at his lips. "Oh, yeah?"

George lightly rolled his eyes. "Shut up—you had a wedding ring, so did I, obviously—"

"Naturally," Dream chimed in, teasingly.

"As we do." George played along, earning a soft laugh from Dream. "And um," His eyes fluttered shut with a sharp inhale. "We had...children."

When Dream didn't say anything, George re-opened his eyes to meet Dream's. No longer sporting the teasing look on his face, playfulness stripped from green irises.

George swallowed, narrowing his eyes on Dream. "Told you it was weird."

George, for a reason he felt sick about, wanted Dream to deny his claim—to tell him that it *wasn't* weird.

Dream's gaze flitted to his interlocked fingers, still resting on George's chest. Slowly tucking his chin on his knuckles, Dream looked up at George through his lashes. "How many?"

George's voice was near inaudible. "Two."

"Hm," Dream's expression told him *nothing* and George hated the part of him that held his breath in anticipation. "Boys or girls?"

"One boy and one girl." George's smile wavered when he saw a small tug at the corner of Dream's lips, which pushed him to continue, "She had blonde hair, he had darker hair. But they both had

your eyes.”

Dream’s chuckle was quickly suppressed with a cough. “Blonde hair, dark hair, both had my eyes—are you...” He squinted at George. “...insinuating that you *carried* my children, George?” George’s hand flew from where it idly laid in Dream’s hair to cover his own eyes. “Because,” Dream strenuously spoke through a laugh. “I don’t believe that’s biologically possible—”

“It was a *dream*.” George pulled his hand away, returning it to Dream’s hair. “Biology doesn’t *matter* in dreams.” He playfully rolled his eyes.

Dream chuckled, propping himself up, caging George’s middle between his forearms, barely hovering above him. “Wish it didn’t matter out here either.”

That momentarily blurred George’s mind as he found himself wordlessly staring up into Dream’s gaze.

“You serious?”

Dream smiled faintly. “Mhm.”

George’s squint was followed by the crease of his forehead as he studied Dream’s features. “So... it’s not weird that...” He stirred underneath Dream. “...like...that I found it...kind of nice?”

A grin broke out onto Dream’s face as if he’d been clinging onto every pause to hear those exact words. “Do you see yourself living that life someday?”

And truthfully, George thought marriage and children was the dumbest fucking normalized course of one’s life. For the longest time, he thought one must’ve had no passion to use the sole life they were given, surrendering it to marital duties, being locked in one place while having to cater to lousy children.

But staring into the eyes of his lover, the swirling memories of that dreamy morning returned.

“If you’d ask me even a day ago, I’d say that you were talking absolute nonsense, but...” George brushed the loose blonde strands from Dream’s forehead. “...but I think all of it makes sense so long as I’m doing it with you...so,” His eyes reeled over the curves of Dream’s golden features. “yes. I do, with you.”

Another held gaze, another set of muted words, another withheld inhale—until the tension was released through a simultaneous breath.

George puffed out his cheeks. “Sorry. That was...a conversation and a half to have...given everything that’s happened.”

“No, no, um...” Dream blinked himself back from what felt like an everlasting tunnel vision. He straightened up in his seat, arms to himself, George at a loss for his warmth.

It was in the sudden change of Dream’s demeanour that George lost a bit of reassurance—almost like he could tell what was to come next.

“If anything, I think...that conversation gave me more reassurance than any of the talks we’ve had.” George waited for an explanation, not facially reacting, despite his rising heart rate.

“Reassurance that...you *want* to stay. And that you’re not still...chasing after...” Dream cleared his throat, looking away from George when he realized the shift he had caused between them. “...sorry—”

“No, I’m sorry.”

Admittedly, George knew it couldn’t be as easy as rejoicing and pretending that everything was alright; discussing future plans, going as far as imagining a future of marital bliss. Not when George was still battling his addiction, brain wired differently than others regarding the perception of life.

George repeated, with a small grimace, “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t.” Dream mumbled, earning George’s gaze. “It hurts you, saying that,” He reached over, wrapping his fingers around George’s thigh. “so don’t.”

George sat up straighter against the headboard, dismissing the pain that shot through him. “What’d you mean?”

Dream’s gaze staggered on George as if he wavered on the option of remaining wordless or dumping the thoughts that pricked his brain. Choosing the latter, Dream exhaled, “When we first met, I kept apologizing. And you’d always try to get me to stop. I thought it was because you wanted me to kill that habit of over-apologizing for shit that wasn’t my fault.” His tongue slicked over his lips. “But now I get what it was really about.”

George deflected his eyes to his lap, fidgeting with the hem of his shirt.

“It sounds meaningless to you, doesn’t it?” Dream asked, earning a shred of George’s gaze. “The word ‘sorry’?” He lost his visual retention once more. “You hate hearing it ‘cause you hate saying it, yourself?”

George chewed on his bottom lip. Looking into Dream’s eyes, at that moment, became an impossible task. Whenever Dream would undress him with his words, George felt like one glimpse at green irises and he would completely fall apart. Perfectly stacked and specifically placed emotions on a pillar as fragile as towered cards was George’s fabricated image. One that only a breath of fire could topple over.

“Just makes me feel helpless.” George sniffled, hating the way his voice came out weak, how tears already began pricking his eyes. “Sounds empty. Like, I’m not saying enough—like it doesn’t do enough to fix the damage of its provocation: the fucking...sorries. They don’t do *enough*.” He mindlessly twisted the duvet covers in his grip. “And I want to do more.” He sighed out desperately, finally locking eyes with Dream’s own: forest green luring the next words out of him. “I want to do more, Dream.”

Dream shifted closer to George, both hands gently caressing George's thighs. “What more do you want to do exactly?”

“Wanna stop hurting people—hurting you.”

“What about yourself?”

“What?”

“Do you wanna stop hurting yourself, as well?” Dream reiterated. “Because that’s what hurts us.”

They hadn’t really had the time to talk about George’s relapse. And because George couldn’t manage an explanation. Nor did he have one.

George felt confident in saying that he had good intentions. That he was good-natured. But what

ripped all of that pride from him was the reminder that although he *was* a lover, he was an addict first and foremost. And that exonerated any and all efforts by that part of him—that part of him that *wouldn't* have gone off on Karl, the part of him that *would've* told Punz he dropped the packet of crystals, the part of him that *would've* halted Dream's, "I'm proud of you." when he was high out of his mind.

And so coming to this point in time, George was left to repent. Something he owed Dream, and everyone else he hurt, for even *half* the shit he put them through.

"I think I can stop." George swallowed hard, feeling the ache in his throat. "I can...I can try, but...I just...I need to go slowly."

And by that, George meant he needed a detox. And that that was going to be *painstakingly* slow. And that Dream would have no choice but to witness the horrors of withdrawal at its peak.

In expecting hurt and defeat to flash through Dream's expression, George was surprised when he felt a warm embrace cup his cheeks.

Dream softly peered into his eyes. "Okay, and how do we do that?"

George squirmed in uneasiness for the immediate willingness on Dream's part. The fear of commitment rising within him, pushing George to make it sound as complicated as he could to irk Dream. But forest green eyes melted an entire solace within George's soul the more he lingered in their gaze.

A realization settled within George that the process wasn't as hard as he wanted it to be because he *didn't* want to let go of the drugs. But he would. He would for the sole reason of feeling that burn in the pit of his stomach. For the warmth at his cheek and within the entirety of Dream—*George would.*

"F-Fel...Felicity needs to, um," George winced. "She has...medication, remedies that help...the-the process."

"Okay," Dream slowly nodded.

"So, I need...need that. You'd have to, um," George squeezed his eyes shut. "Give...them to me."

"Okay."

"Cause I'll probably not want to take them sometimes."

But I would,

"Yeah, okay."

For you, I will.

George crashed his head into the curve of Dream's neck, ignoring the immediate pain shooting through his wound and at his core—whatever agony he was physically in, it stood unmatched to the one that weighed heavy in his admittance—in his willingness to let go. For good, this time.

"Are you scared?" Dream noiselessly asked with a gentle squeeze at George's thigh. "Yeah?" George nodded. "Okay—it's okay. It's also okay if you don't get it on the first try," George, at that rate, wasn't able to reel back the tear that slipped down his cheek. "Just gotta keep trying, though, okay?"

“I promise.” George nodded.

That, George figured, sounded better than a ‘sorry’. That sounded like what it was—a promise for the efforts that he was setting himself up to fulfil. And that made it sound less defeated. The opposite of helpless. The opposite of giving up.

Dream cradled George’s head into the space of his neck. George clutched onto the silky fabric of his shirt, where certain spots were soaked in salt drops. They remained as such while the sun gradually fell into the horizon, the natural light escaping them.



Dream’s tired features were tauntingly etched into George’s brain. So, when Dream had dozed off, George took that as his opportunity to step out of the room.

And he found himself at the door of Karl’s bedroom.

A hesitant hand reaching for the doorknob, even if a big part of him was positive Karl wouldn’t be in there—*always hiding away in your atelier*.

Twisting the doorknob and progressing into the room, George was hit with Karl’s cologne. Although he barely spent time here, salty driftwood and bergamot filled George’s nostrils with every step. His eyes immediately caught the desk underneath the tall french windows; the surface busy with drawing pencils, paintbrushes and a plethora of unfinished sketches.

A fond smile tugged at the corner of George’s lips, bringing his free hand while the other remained clutched at his bandaged wound that ached with every step he took. He found it easy to dismiss the pang, in a sick sense of self-torture for the abomination he had become around the boy whose room this belonged to.

Passing his fingers over the sketches, George made out the vague structure of Quackity’s face. And Niki’s. All contrasted with the imaginative hybrid creatures that Karl humoured himself with. George continued his venture through Karl’s artistic mind; projected through the pencil and the smudged lead of his palm, and onto paper.

Side-stepping the table, George caught the rack of canvases and he flipped through them, mindlessly looking over his shoulder to capture the vacant easel before returning his gaze to where his hand had stopped at the last canvas; hidden away behind other unfinished projects was the sole piece Karl *had* finished.

George winced and grunted as he carried the canvas over to the easel, propping it up with vehemence because he just *knew*—from the slight glimpse he had previously caught—*that it was a portrait of him*.

George, dressed in Karl’s clothes; baggy and purposely exposing his skin. Smoke swirling from the joint tucked between his teeth. All painted in gouache—soft blue tones, faint addendums of greens on the garments. The memory sat with every apparent flick of Karl’s paintbrushes and surfaced George’s mind the longer he stared in awe.

Bringing a shaky hand to cradle his cheek, George reached out and traced the lines of the portrait just as he recalled Karl doing that hazy night.

“Do you like it?”

George nearly jumped out of his skin, whirling around to face Karl; dishevelled and defeated in his

stance as he stumbled against the doorframe. George had gotten high with him one too many times to be able to immediately detect the blunt smoke rendering the heavy-lidded gaze.

George's voice was barely audible as he said, "I love it."

Karl sniffled as he juttied his chin to the canvas. "Wasn't sure when to give it to you," *But the way his eyes were red-rimmed*, George couldn't tell if that was from the blunt smoke, or from his grief. "So, I never did."

"Should have." George's lips quivered up into a half-smile. "It's beautiful." He noiselessly whispered.

Karl went just as quiet as he said, "Thanks."

A blurry gaze was shared, growing tears as it pained them to look at the other; the distance between them, metaphorical or physical, worsening their state.

"You're an exceptional artist." George strenuously spoke, throat aching.

Karl exhaled through his nose, a sad terse laugh. He hung his head slightly, shakily whispering to the ground, "Only when something really inspires me."

The only finished portrait. George wanted to squeeze the hand that nursed his bandaged wound just so he could feel *anything* other than whatever tantalizing pain resided between him and Karl.

"You're okay." Karl finally breathed out, locking eyes with George.

"Are you?"

Karl pressed his lips into a thin line, attempting a smile before directing it at the ground. "Only if you are."

"I won't be okay until you tell me you're okay." George blurted out through the inability to repress any more of the rushing tears.

George knew Karl was avoiding eye contact for the exact reason that followed when Karl rejoiced their gaze: the both of them burst into tears—*still*, in complete silence, pushing down any vocalized affliction.

"I understand if you're angry with me," George sniffled, unable to reel back the salty stream. "I was an asshole to you—no, I was a piece of shit—I manipulated you and that is so fucked up, Karl. I am so, so fucking sorry. And I *know* you must be getting tired of hearing it—I'm getting fucking *exhausted* of saying it and it's all my fault. All of it is my fault. None of it is your fault. I was just so fucking overwhelmed, saying shit I didn't mean—I didn't mean any of it, Karl. I swear to you." He ran both sets of his fingers through his hair, sucking in a deep inhale. "God, please say something—or actually, don't. Don't say anything. You don't owe me shit—"

"Stop—"

"Honestly, I wouldn't blame you if you never wanted to speak to me again. I wouldn't blame you." George's hand flew to his mouth, stifling a sob when Karl puffed out a breath, turning away from him, from the hurt that George somehow *continued* to settle within him. "Sorry, sorry, sorry." He withdrew his hand, wiping the tears from his flushed complexion. "I will do any—just tell me what you want and I'll do it. I'll do anything you want—"

“I just want my best friend back.” Karl sputtered through a broken whimper; seizing George’s rambles. A stinging gaze met George’s, locking him in agonizing silence. “The real you—it’s all I want. Can you bring him back?” George’s head tilted with a helpless, oscillating breath. “‘Cause I really fucking need him right now—”

“Fuck, Karl,” George rushed towards him, the pain at his wound seamless as he lurched into Karl’s embrace, wrapping two tight arms around his shoulders, which shook and trembled. “I’m sorry things got so fucked up that I lost myself. S’not an excuse, I know that.” Karl clutched George’s shirt so tightly that George thought he heard a small tear. “And I know I can’t keep getting away with it by simply apologizing—”

“George—”

“I will spend *every single day* of my life making it up to you. I’ll—”

“I don’t need you to apologize.” Karl’s words warmed George’s shoulder, sending a shudder down the brunet’s spine. “I just need you to promise me something.”

“Yes,” George clutched him. “Anything.”

“Promise me you’ll get clean.”

This was risky. This brought him back to the promise he’d made Quackity when he was high, unbeknownst to the younger. This was *risky*.

But this was *Karl*. Karl, who always welcomed him back with open arms, who always held him when he crashed, who *always* understood him more than anyone else did.

And treading back to the promise he made to Dream, George sighed out, “I’ll try.”

Karl pulled away, cupping George’s neck. “I know I was never one to care before but this is hurting way too much—seeing you like this, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Promise—”

“I promise I’ll try. I’ll try *really fucking* hard.”

A smile, no matter how bittersweet, corroded Karl’s lips and George felt the biggest weight being lifted off his shoulders, reeling an exhale out of him: his biggest state of regret had been forgiven.

George wasn’t sure how long they remained in each other’s hold, but Karl was the first to pull away.

“Fuck.” Karl sniffled as he wiped his tears. “I should probably go wake the others, huh?”

George shook his head, frantic. “Not yet. Please. Just...hold off on it—they’re all sleeping here?”

“Downstairs. In the common room.”

George groaned, hiding his face in the crook of Karl’s neck, earning a light laugh in return. “I feel like the shittiest person in the world right now.”

“You should feel honoured, instead.” Karl delicately rubbed George’s back. “Turn your sourest lemons—”

“Oh, don’t start—”

“Into lemonade—”

“Shush.”

“Seek the silver-lining—”

“You sound like Cole—”

“The brightsi—that’s a compliment. Cole’s a great guy.”

George huffed, “Hence my remorse.”

Karl chuckled, the sound untangling the stressed knots in George’s muscles. “Don’t feel remorseful for being loved, George.”



Despite knowing there was a possibility George wouldn’t succeed in sobriety on the first try, there was something that had switched in George’s demeanour—his reaction to the topic being brought up. There was something that switched in him altogether, like something had clicked when he was unconscious, following his near-death.

A revelation could be what it was. Dream hoped it was. Because George was always a ten out of ten, no matter what subconscious he entered: sober or high. But George exceeded all limits when he was solely himself—*for himself*.

That’s what it was, Dream realized shortly after George came down from a course of incessant tears, *he was starting life*—once again—not only for others but himself. Not in a selfish sense—*Dream doesn’t think George, at his core, could be selfish if he tried*.

George was *living* for himself, as one should.

With all those worries slowly soothed from Dream’s head, he was able to see everything a little clearer. With a clear vision came the realization that the crown was now in his hands. Vulcan was his realm to reign and his father...*was no longer here*.

Dream was told he was free. And when he had been holding George in his arms, as the quietness of the Kingdom brightly overlooked them, Dream *felt* free.

“Hey, where’d you go?” Dream propped himself up on his elbows where he had dozed off, eyes following George’s steps towards him before he painfully climbed into bed. With a lot of effort so as to not apply pressure on his wound, George settled between Dream’s legs, his head resting on his chest.

“Karl’s home.”

Dream’s eyebrows shot up. “Actually?”

“We just spoke.” George shot him a faint smile and Dream returned the gesture.

Dream could tell the void between George’s relationship with Karl was killing him. And it was further confirmed when that beaten-down look was no longer present as he currently studied the slight uplift in George’s countenance.

“How’d it go?”

“Good.” George leaned his chin on Dream’s peck. “Think everyone just wants the same from me. Same thing they always have.”

“I never asked you...” Soft copper irises drew to him. “...how you’re feeling. About *that*.”

George chuckled. “You can say it.”

“Are you craving them? Right now?”

George’s silence spoke volumes whenever that question was posed. Dream braced himself for whatever answer he was to receive.

“Honestly? I’d love to get high right now.” George quietly admitted, Dream clung onto that pause that George took, “But after speaking with you and Karl. And knowing that I have yet to speak with Q and Niki—and Fel, my father...dunno. Just...getting real fucking tired of apologizing. Not worth the temporary fix.” George mindlessly traced Dream’s collarbones. “I still feel like I’m in a limbo of sorts, but I’d choose that over the constant cycle of relapse and guilt any day.”

Dream smiled down at him, the curvature progressing when George finally looked up at him. “Can I say the thing?”

George was confused for a fraction of a second before he suppressed a smile, pretending to hate the impending words on Dream’s tongue as he rolled his eyes. “No—”

“I’m proud of you.”

George sighed, shooting him a look. Yet, despite his facade, George’s arms tucked themselves underneath Dream’s own before he nudged them, silently asking Dream to wrap them around his frame.

George went quiet for a while. Dream wondered if he had fallen asleep. But there were soft and dainty fingers playing the buttons of his shirt, causing for effortless fond smiles etching Dream’s face.

“Dream?”

“Yeah?”

“What would you say...is the difference between...a lover and an anchor?”

Dream could tell sleep was slowly pulling George in from the slur in his tone, the mindless question that didn’t really have anything to do with their previous conversations.

“An anchor keeps you grounded. A lover does the opposite, at times.” A calloused hand slid down to the small of George’s back, “I’d say it’s kind of, like, the soulmate versus the one, you know?” A soft hum. “An anchor is your soulmate. The two of you...” He dismissed the return of the futile jealousy he felt for a chestnut-haired prince, continuing gently, “...share a deeper psychic connection. You connect in every way possible.”

A delicate hand tucked itself in the curve of Dream’s neck. “And the one?”

“The one could be your polar opposite, who...does little things you hate. Things you end up loving ‘cause you love them—‘cause you can’t help it.”

“Like...” George’s breath ruffled the flimsiness of the shirt’s collar. “...a feeling...bigger than yourself? Out of your control?”

Dream nodded. “Loss of self-control.”

“So,” George stirred in Dream’s arms, brushing his knuckles to line Dream’s jaw. “If I’m your anchor and also the reason you lose control...how do I make you feel?”

Dream had thought about it for a while. He hadn’t really gotten the answer until George’s relapse. Until he was blindly moving past villagers, bumping shoulders and shoving people out of the way to get to George, even if he knew he’d be too late.

“My mom used to say that real love...should have your soul screaming at the top of its lungs while it...drowns *itself* in...all and every emotion known to mankind,”

The words diluted and thickened in their silence until George fully propped himself up on his elbows, half-hovering above Dream who smiled up at him. Confusion laced with adoration and awe settled within a fair complexion that Dream figured he could love for the rest of his life if given the opportunity.

“That’s how you make me feel, George.”

As George beamed down at him, a glint in dark eyes where no light was present to accentuate it, Dream wanted to add, *every time you look at me, like this*, he cupped George’s face, pushing his thumb under his jaw before brushing over the defined skin, *I feel like I lose all sense of self*. George bit down on his bottom lip, a grin so bright it augmented the growth of Dream’s own.

Every time you look at me, like this, George leaned his forehead against Dream’s, his nose scrunched as he brushed the tip of it against Dream’s cheekbone, *I feel like I am nothing and everything all at once*.

Chapter End Notes

one more one more one more. the next one will be full fluff, light angst (at best), little hurt/comfort cos ye know how we do over here.

alright. thank u for the nice. have a good one, treat yourselves good, as you should always. x (:

Death and All His Friends

Chapter Notes

Trăiască viața, viva la vida, and long live life or sum

Enjoy x.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



10 September.

George can't exactly remember who was crying or how many tears were shed when he rejoiced with Quackity, Felicity, Cole and Niki.

But it was a *lot*.

What with the events leading up to the battle, their wins and their losses, everything in-between and thereafter hitting them all at once. They were finally able to *be* with each other with no tempestuous interruptions.

And for the first time in a long while, George was...*happy*.

He made a realization that he didn't always need to feel that way. Because he would feel let down and much worse when he *wasn't* happy; which was when he was sat, with Dream, in front of Felicity's desk as she rummaged through the remedies.

The detox.

George hadn't realized Dream was holding his hand until he felt a light squeeze. He looked to his right, capturing Dream's smile, which temporarily shaved off a portion of his volatile nerves.

There was still a part of him that *despised* having to include Dream in this process. And George told Dream numerous times, before stepping inside Felicity's office, that he didn't have to accompany him. Didn't have to be part of the detox altogether.

"I don't want you to feel ashamed of getting to the point that most people in your situation dream of getting to, George."

"Yeah, but I put myself in this situation, Dream. I'm tired of dragging you into it."

"You're not dragging me into it. This doesn't feel like a chore. I'm your boyfriend, not your nurse, remember?" Dream cracked a smile on George's lips; seeming shamelessly proud of himself for succeeding in his attempt to do so. *"And as your boyfriend, I am so fucking honoured to be a part of this. With you."*

"Dream—"

"And that's why I'll never stop saying it—"

“Don’t—”

“I’m so fucking proud of you—”

“Shut up.”

“Never,” George remembered the warmth that immediately encased him; from Dream’s discourse to the arms that wrapped him whole. “I’ll never stop reminding you.”

“Alrighty,” Felicity sighed, sitting up straight. “On with the process. It’s not extensive, at all, since we’re doing something about it before it gets...too late.” She passed a packet across the table and towards the pair. “So. You have to crush these up, mix them with tea, preferably. Drink two *full*—” She shot George a glare, one he returned. “—*mugs* a day. And, then, um.” She paused, massaging her neck as she slowly unclasped a zipped container of—*oh, fuck*. “These are *kind* of like the sedatives Karl gave you except it won’t put you to sleep—just a painkiller for the cramps and whenever your skin feels like it has...bugs crawling...all over...” Her tone died down when a gradually horrified expression etched George’s face. “...listen, I know you hate needles, but if you can endure the physical discomfort, you won’t ever have to use them.”

“Fuck’s sake. How many times?”

“Just once.” Felicity softly replied. “Just one quick shot in the arm. I know you can manage it yourself, but—”

“I’ll do it.” Dream chimed in. Felicity and George immediately looked at him. “I can do it.”

George’s eyes fluttered shut as he looked away from them both; plagued by shame. But George didn’t fail to notice that what should’ve sounded like a task, didn’t, in the tone Dream had used to vocalize his willingness to assist.

“That’s it.” Felicity clapped her hand once. “Three days of little torture—”

“Little—”

“Lovie?” Felicity tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. “I don’t want you to rely on these too much. These are for the physical pains of withdrawal. The rest will be up here,” She tapped her temple. “Remedies can’t help that. So,” She leaned back in her chair. “I know you used to journal. Pick that up again, okay? I promise it’ll help.”

George couldn’t *fathom* the idea of picking up a pen unless his eyes could barely see the words he was writing, but there *was* a point in time, prior to the whirlwind of addiction, where reading and writing granted him the hoped escape from this Kingdom.

“Bring out that inner Kafka in you, angel-face.”

George scoffed. “You know journaling actually drove him to madness, right?”

Felicity rolled her eyes. “Yes, but there were some good entries in there.”

The weight of this entire exchange was exhaled through George’s sigh before he turned to look at Dream.

Dream shrugged at him, “Don’t look at me, I have no idea what the hell you guys are talking about right now.” earning a suppressed laugh from Felicity and a smile filled with adoration from George.



When they returned home—home being Salacia, that night, Dream was standing in front of the fog-muddled mirror after their shower. George had been watching him attentively because Dream had been standing still.

Dream wasn't doing anything at the sink, not reaching for a toothbrush, or the tap handle, or even looking in the mirror. Dream's attention was lost at the counter.

"Dream?" George finally called after what he counted as two whole minutes.

Two whole minutes of stillness—from the one person who spoke with movements—restlessness turning motionless.

Dream didn't respond. George gave him a minute, wrapping a towel around his waist before soundlessly walking over to Dream. He slowly inched a touch onto Dream, knowing that abruptly hugging Dream would startle him out of a thought—a series of them—tantalizing him into incendiary silence.

George remembered Metanoia, then; their bond through it. How, the closest they were, spiritually, and physically, granted them communication without voicing a single word.

Feeling a shred of what Dream was feeling, George found himself saying, "I'm sorry it didn't work out with your family." chin moving against the dip of Dream's spine with each hushed word, followed by a lingering kiss on wet skin.

Dream slid his hands over George's forearms, clutched onto them before lightly tugging George around him; caging George against the edge of the counter before prompting a hungry kiss. George was unsure of the abruptness and he could tell Dream was, as well, when his kisses began slowing down at George's collarbone.

"Don't stop, George." Dream mumbled when George tried to cease the carnal trace at Dream's neck. "Don't st—"

"Dream," George nestled Dream's face, pulling it away from its refuge in the curve of his neck. "Let's just..." Dream avoided his gaze, George could tell tears begged to surface. "...let's just go to sleep, yeah?"

George was the one to hold Dream that night. In the darkness and quietness of George's room, *nothing needed to be said.*

They went to sleep. Dream did, at least. George didn't sleep well. He barely slept. He watched Dream, the ceiling, the floor, the covers, and began falling asleep when Dream was starting to stir awake with the rising sun.



11 September.

Thursday. I slept for two hours, or three. Hard to tell. I am so fucking irritated. It began in the late morning, an itch I couldn't scratch—in more ways than one; the main reason for these entries not having yet struck me. It was my bandage needing to be switched out. Like an infant in need of his diaper being changed. It's helplessness and irritation before the apex of withdrawal dawns on me. Day two and it's only the goddamn afternoon.

Irritation started when George found himself snapping at Dream that morning for leaving his clothes on the floor. He wasn't even a clean freak, nor would he have normally cared, but withdrawals were kicking in.

Irritation travelled into restlessness at dinner.

George wasn't going to ask Ana to return the wine bottles that were always part of the dinner spread, especially not when the Salacia warriors deserved this feast for their efforts in the battle.

But God did George want to drain each and every single bottle tauntingly staring back at him.

It wasn't even that he *wanted* to be drunk, not really. He just wanted to feel at ease because everything was irritating him.

George hadn't even realized he was bouncing his leg until Dream laid his wrist atop his knee. Glancing down, George caught the lent pocket knife.

Looking at him, George caught Dream's shrug as if to say, "*Worth a try.*"

George was so desperate for any distraction that he took the pocketknife from Dream. "Teach me how or it's gonna be useless."

Dream chuckled and nodded before showing George the motion of how he twirled it to keep the motion constant. George did that for the rest of dinner.



George realized he should've taken the irritation and restlessness as a sign. Should've known to have a second cup of tea as per Felicity's recommendation, but he didn't. Due to that, George woke up, back sticky with cold sweats, hair clinging to his forehead, and breath ragged.

He could hear Dream's voice, though it sounded like it was muffled underwater. He could *faintly* hear Dream asking him what he needed. George wanted to tell him that he just needed to *puke*, but his answer took the form of a retching noise before George could even think about moving from the bed.

And fuck, as George's vision blurred on the puddle in his lap, he felt a wave of embarrassment and guilt, *the precise reason why he didn't want Dream to be part of this process.*

But Dream was there. Dream shushed George when he babbled apologies. Took George to the bath he ran for him and switched the sheets whilst George sat motionless in the swaying bathwater.

George felt defeated, ugly, and gross. And the *last* person he needed to see him in the state that he was, *didn't* want to give up. Dream *wasn't* giving up.

Having brought George back to bed as the brunet nursed the mug of brewing tea leaves, Dream brought his lips to his forehead, pressing a chaste kiss on the cooling skin, "One more day, George." He brushed away the damp, loose strand obstructing George's eyes. "One more day."



12 September.

I don't think I can do this. I can't even hold a fucking pen right now. It's taking me so long to write, get my words out. I keep puking everything my father begs me to eat. ~~I can't fathom food.~~ I can't

fathom looking into Dream's eyes. ~~I'm so scared.~~ I'm so scared of scaring him. Why doesn't he look scared? ~~How can he love me?~~ How can he love this? How? How? How? How? How did I get so lucky for being so fucked in the head? Every time I write, I'm just reminded of how much of a fuck up I am.

I'm not an author, poet, or artist. ~~Writing doesn't help.~~ I am an addict, through and through. ~~Drugs do.~~ I can't d

Dream knew what he was signing himself up for when George mentioned a detox. He'd never experienced one first-hand, but he'd experienced his mother's low lows, which he assumed would go sort of like a detox. *Withdrawals are low-lows, in a way.*

But what Dream failed to remind himself was that he was dealing with *George*. He wasn't dealing with his mother's condition, he was dealing with George's addiction. And unlike the situation with his mother, Dream didn't have Sapnap's helping hand.

This was all on him.

But Felicity's words came back in assistance when Dream was blindly cleaning up George's mess on the sheets.

"It's a privilege, you know? And the biggest compliment—this responsibility that they trust us to have over them,"

Not him and Sapnap. Not him and—or anyone else.

"only us."

Friday evening, Dream remembered walking into his room to find George sitting at the edge of the bed, shaking and trembling in his spot. Dream remembered reaching for George's arm and being pierced with ice. Dream remembered George's blubbling chorus of *"I can't. I can't. I can't."* as the capped needle stuttered in his hand.

Dream remembered coaxing George through the process, *"Don't look at it,"* taking the shot from him. *"Just look at me. I'll be really quick with it. I promise."* Remembered George's aimless kicks at the ground as he squirmed and whimpered, defiant, *freaking out* at the scratch of the needle against his skin.

And although it *killed* Dream to cause him any sort of hurt, George needed to be put out of his misery. The agonizing ice of withdrawal congealing him would only disappear with the oiled herbs of the shot that Dream eventually—after receiving digging fingernails into his shoulder blades and bite marks on his neck from George's pain—managed to sink through his system; liberating George from the surmounting torture, plunging him into peaceful numbness.



13 September.

It's the essence of Orpheus in him that confounds me, 'till this day. He's exceptional. He's brought me back to life as if I were Eurydice, herself. Multiple times, he's ventured for my hand in the wasteland; where the dead and buried decay in my mind. What confounds me, also, is that I let him. A hand dripping in gold reaches for me and I grant the touch. I'm pulled to the surface and bathe in his sunlight. My love, my love, my love—my golden boy.

I am well, this afternoon. Slept horribly, still. But I am well.

It's a weird feeling but I grant the touch.

I am well.

Dream noticed the fragileness in George since the remedy began seeping out of his system sometime last night, hours after the interrupted dinner. And he was bracing himself for another crash, but it never came.

It was now the afternoon of the following day and it had yet to come. Dream wasn't sure if he was being naive by believing that it wouldn't *ever* come.

Sapnap voiced his worries when Dream returned to Vulcan that afternoon, but slowly retracted them upon stating that Dream looked *"oddly at ease for assisting your boyfriend through a detox."*

The two of them practiced together for a bit and Dream was even more at ease. In the comfort of the only Vulcan family he had left, Dream was at ease. And he found that this serenity followed him into his own practice when Sapnap had left to host dinner, per Dream's request.

As Dream seamlessly jabbed his sword into the dummy, a realization struck him. *I don't hate this because you're not breathing down my neck*, Dream thought as his eyes flicked down to his sword where it had been plunged in a *deja-vu* of that moment with his father on the battlefield.

A knock followed by a voice he'd recognize blind caught his attention as Dream whirled on his spot to catch George; clutching his journal to his stomach, wearing a smile that reached his eyes —*sporting your crown, something you haven't worn in a long while*.

"Hey," Dream grinned.

George remained on the platform of the steps leading into the training room. "Hi."

"I was gonna come to you in a bit." Dream undid the hand-wraps, keeping his gaze on George because—*there was a luminescence in your complexion, one I thought I'd lost for good*. "Have you eaten?"

George stepped down before taking a seat on the platform, "Not yet." setting his journal in his lap. "You?"

Dream puffed, "No. Wasn't all that hungry." tossing the abused hand-wraps into a bucket before walking over to George. "I am now, though."

Crouching down to level their eyes, Dream steadied himself on George's knees, earning a giggle and a light shove from George when he tried to lean his weight into him. "*Dream—*"

"Give me a kiss," Dream pouted, leaning in again, earning another shove.

"You're *sweaty—*"

Dream managed to capture George's lips with his, barely earning a fight when George giggled against the embrace, contently sighing into it as he reciprocated.

Scarcely pulling away, George whirled his stare of Dream's features with a growing grin. "So, I haven't eaten, neither have you," Dream nodded, gaze lost in the soft curvature of George's lips. "Wanna come to mine and cook us something?"

Dream's brows slowly knitted. "Us?"

George chuckled. “Niki, Karl, Q and I?”

Dream’s eyes widened slightly. “Great, not only do I have to deal with my *biggest* critic—”

“I *love* your cooking. You know that—”

“But now I have to deal with *Alex*, as well?”

George laughed; one that chimed soft, but loud enough that it rang through Dream’s head, tenderly kissing each nerve. “He’ll be nice. I’ll make sure of it.”

Dream playfully rolled his eyes. “If you say so,” He glimpsed down at the leatherbound journal caged in delicate fingers. “You’re still writing, huh?”

“Word-vomiting, really.”

“That’s the whole point, right? Get it all out of there,” Dream tapped George’s temple, causing George to simper at the touch. “And onto paper?” Another nod, another passing smile. “Hey, um, Kafka...published his, right? Like, his diaries? That’s what you read? Actual entries?” Another nod, a grin flashing onto Dream’s face as he asked, “Will you let me read yours, someday?”

George raised his eyebrows, “Oh, fucking hell.” coursing a laugh out of Dream. “I mean...I’d want to edit some of them, *first*—”

“No.” Dream firmly said, almost offended. “I wanna see the unedited version of it.”

“*Why*...?” George whined, rolling his head back.

A gradual tug at the corner of Dream's lips. “Because being invited inside your head makes me feel like a tourist, what with the wonders that lie within you.” George drew in his bottom lip, cheeks blushing pink. Grin growing with the tint in George's complexion, Dream pressed, “So? Will you?”

“Fine.” George noiselessly said, briefly deflecting his gaze. “But not anytime soon.”

Dream hung his head with a winning smile as he quietly whispered, “*Yes*.”

George giggled, cupping Dream’s face before leaning back slightly; copper irises glazing over every inch of Dream’s face.

Dream followed the trail of his eyes. “What?”

George’s lips pursed into an insuppressible smile. “Nothing. Just taking in the man I love.”



Ever since George mentioned the dream he had involving marriage and kids, Dream had been thinking about it.

Mostly about what a marriage would entail. Because Dream thought back to the vows exchanged between his parents; them having him and Punz before they were wedded. And he thought himself and George had exceeded those spoken generalities.

To have and to hold from this day forward—Dream found that they had and held each other before they had even established their relationship. *For better, for worse*, the rupture of fire in Karl’s atelier, the comedowns, *in sickness and in health*, the detox days, the candid smiles the morning after the last day, *to love and to cherish until we are parted by death*—and even when George took

that fall on the battlefield, there was no one else. There was no one else he could love and Dream knew that. Knew that they weren't going to be parted *by* death because he would search every inch of the world to find George again—to *love and to cherish, forever*.

Dream wasn't fazed when George brought up marriage and not because he's thought about it before, but because the image of them getting married made too much sense for it to have even caused the slightest movement within him.

Dream thought '*kids*' was a new one; raising children *with* George. That was something to dwell on. And yet, even then, it didn't rock Dream in the way that settled shock within him, but comfort. Comfort because he couldn't think of anyone better, anyone kinder, anyone more gentle than George to handle their hypothetical children.

Because he trusted George. He trusted George because George *sensed* something was wrong with Dream's upbringing without him having to even say anything. George felt the same amount of anger towards Sebastian, not only because of what he did to Anthea but because of how he had a harsh grip on Dream.

And because Dream experienced the love, care, softness and delicacy of George first-hand to know that he was *the one*—for every and all aspects in his future.

Domesticity came seamlessly with them. Dream found it in almost everything they did together.

Even as simple as sitting here in the kitchen, with Quackity, Karl, and Niki at the marbled island, as they finished up a dinner Dream had cooked per George's request—since it was well past dinner and Ana was fast asleep.

"Listen, I'm just saying—"

"Karl, *please* stop." George groaned through a laugh, dropping the sponge into the sink.

"No, no, let him speak," Dream half-turned from the sink, placing the plate back into it before glancing at Karl. "You would do *what* to the linguine?"

"Dream, dude," Karl leaned into the island, already bubbling a laugh between the two of them. "I would make *the* most *intense* love to this linguine."

"There's not enough fucking salt in it. What are you even *on* about?" Quackity chimed in.

Niki laughed, "Not everyone—" muttering a quick apology to George for adding her plate to the sink before looking at Quackity, "—wants a stroke when they're eating food, Q."

"Oh my g—don't associate me with their behaviour. Please." George tried to turn Dream away from them with his forearms, avoiding the use of his soaped hands. "These people just came into my life one day," Breaking into a faint giggle he failed to conceal, George added, "I didn't choose them—"

Dream laughed, "*Oh*, but you did," playfully pushing George's arms away. "And you're responsi
__"

"Yo," Quackity whistled, "Dog boy," snapping his fingers at Dream. "I'm not saying it's shit, it's...*alright*, I guess—I just wouldn't *fuck* it."

Dream burst into a light laugh, speaking with the dishrag he flailed, "Well, I'm not *asking* you to
__"

“What about...” Karl pointed his fork at Quackity, “...a sweet, gentle kiss?” tilting his head suggestively.

Quackity slowly squinted at Karl, “Are you *mentally* unstable?”

George shot him a glare. “*Quackity*.”

“Yo, Dream.”

Dream’s head snapped in the direction of the doorway, meeting eyes with Sapnap, “Sap?” then Felicity.

“Smells *good* in here,” Felicity slipped past Sapnap, walking over to where Niki sat, hugging her from behind.

“Mom,” Karl perked in his seat. “*holy shit*, you have to try this goddamn linguine, I—”

“Stinknap,” Quackity greeted, muttering his name like a curse word.

“Alex,” Sapnap stated with a roll of his eyes before setting them on Dream. “Queen Felicity came to see you at Vulcan. Brought her back here.”

“She has legs. She can walk by herself.” Quackity mumbled.

“Look, I know this may seem unfathomable to you, but I wanted to be a respectful guard and accompany her through the *dark* village—”

“Oh my god,” Quackity chuckled bitterly, “there’s no way you’re *still* talking.”

“Alex...” Felicity warningly narrowed her eyes on Quackity before she directed them to Dream. “Anyway, yes. I’d like to speak with you, Dream. If you don’t mind.”

“Um,” George chimed in before Dream could answer her. “*I* mind, Fel, actually.” receiving a sly look from Felicity.

Wrapping a hand around George’s forearm, Dream said, “I don’t mind at all.” earning a winsome smile from her. He carefully patted the dish rag onto George’s shoulder, who frowned at him. “Don’t look at me like that—I’ll be *right* back.” He quickly brushed his knuckle against the tip of George’s nose, which he scrunched at the touch.

Dream barely gave him time to rebuttal as he placed a chaste kiss on George’s forehead, a gesture George returned on Dream’s arm just as he passed him to follow behind Felicity.

Felicity wordlessly guided Dream towards what he assumed was Anthea’s office and he didn’t question a single thing as he followed closely behind her. They were greeted by Cole, who sat in the office chair as Felicity and Dream occupied the loveseat facing his desk.

“Made sure the door was locked?” Cole cocked an eyebrow at Felicity.

Now, Dream was a little nervous.

“Sorry, we just don’t want George eavesdropping. You know how he is.” Cole waved it off as he spoke to Dream, who most *definitely* knew and agreed, if anything, with his statement.

“That’s...fine,” Dream chuckled nervously, glancing at the playing smiles on Felicity’s and Cole’s faces as they lingered on the reason for this initiated talk. “Um. Am I in...some sort of trouble?”

Another laugh riddled with nerves.

“No, no,” Cole assured before motioning to Felicity. “All yours.”

Felicity turned in her seat to face Dream and his heart already began pumping at an indescribable rate. “We wanted to speak with you regarding your coronation.” She had a hard time repressing her smile like what she was to say next was exciting her to no end. “Cole suggested this after a similar talk we shared with Niki, but that’s just to explain why I wanted him here for it.” Dream slowly nodded. “Anyway...I have a proposition for you, lovebug.”

Dream was at a complete loss on the direction that this conversation was headed. “Okay...”

“Okay,” Felicity repeated through a beaming smile. “Dream, how would you like me to walk you down to the throne?”

And that was when it hit him.

The Kingdom upheld the rule that the next-in-line must be walked to the throne by a royal parent and Dream didn’t have anyone to execute that process with both his parents now gone.

Rattled to his core by the request he would’ve never anticipated, Dream shook his head, “No, Felicity, I...I can’t ask that of you.”

Cole chimed in softly, “You’re not asking. She’s offering.”

Dream barely had the time to look at Cole when Felicity reached over to gently grab his hand, “I am.” She upheld his gaze as tender as her touch, and Dream felt like sinking into the ground from a mixture of embarrassment and wistfulness. “No one deserves to be crowned without being accompanied to the throne. Certainly not a coronation as groundbreaking as this one.”

Dream let out a punched-out breath, “Why? Why are you doing this?”

A sympathized smile from Felicity reflected onto Cole’s countenance as he cut in, “Because of the endless love that you continuously show my son. You have been an incredible help to him these past few days. You’ve stuck by his side through one of the grimmest processes to exist.” Dream’s gaze fluttered to his lap, feeling a prickling feeling at the corner of his eyes; feeling the gradual comforting squeeze of Felicity’s hand. “It’s the least we can do for you, Dream.”

“So...” Felicity giggled, shifting in her seat, slightly letting go of Dream’s hand, “what do you say?”

Dream bit down on the inside of his cheek, “Yes.” swallowing his tears with a gulp. “I’d like that—thank you. Thank you—the-the both of you. For, um...for helping me. Even these past few days, allowing me at your dinner table and—”

“Dream, Dream,” Felicity chuckled, shaking her head. “You shouldn’t have to thank us for these things.”

“You’ll come to find that, although your gratitude is much appreciated and held close to our hearts, this family doesn’t ask for it. Not for something as simple as a helping hand. Especially when it is effortless to do so.” Dream looked away from Cole, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees for support, quivering lips pressed into his now fisted hands. “*Especially* since you are now part of this family.”

Part of this family. Dream’s eyes shot up to meet Cole’s. *Domesticity with George, the marriage,*

family—as if everything was being slowly validated, pushing him to the exact thought that he'd been circling; debating on when and where would be the right time to ask. *Wording it, however*, Dream glanced at the two of them, nerves eating him alive, *was going to be hell*.

“And your guard, Nick? He's welcome here any time, as well.”

Dream returned his fists to where they idly laid between his knees. “Cole—and Felicity, um,” Agitated inclinations in his seating. “I appreciate that, a lot. Honestly. I'm very grateful for all the help you've given me. And um,”

Okay. You've got this.

“Just like you don't ask for my gratitude, I'm...not asking for yours—in regards to what I've done for George. It's...an honour, to have had his trust in that process. And it's the least *I* can do for what he's done for me? Which is that he's shown me the love I didn't know still existed within this Kingdom, within...relations—um, within...myself?” Dream fought to uphold Cole's gaze despite only being met with encouraging regard. “I wanted to ask something from the two of you. And I don't expect you to have an answer, nor do I...*need* it right now, but the thought has been on my mind for a while now. And I guess,” Dream rubbed the nape of his neck, feeling the sweat sleeking over his palms. “With everyone that I've lost and...some that I almost lost, I've come to the realization that I don't want to waste any more time.”

Dream could've sworn he heard Felicity faintly whisper something under her breath as she, too, deflected her gaze to her lap.

“Cole, I am...helplessly and sincerely in love with your son,” A gradual, soothing smile rose in Cole's countenance. “I don't think I will ever be able to stop loving him. And even if he falls, should he fall again, I will always be there to catch him. I will do...everything and *anything*...to keep him safe as I cannot...fathom living—merely existing in a world which he is no longer part of.” He narrowed his eyes on Cole, sensing the welling tears. “Every time that I look at him...every time I'm around him, I simply can't see myself spending the rest of my life with anybody else.” He clamped his own hands together again, squashing his nerves. “So, I suppose what I'm asking for, from the both of you,” Dream caught their felled stares, taking the deepest breath he could before earnestly saying, “is your blessing.” He felt like his heart could explode from the silence, but he fearlessly added, “For I would like to marry your son, someday.”

That very silence thickened around the three of them. Dream's heart was in his throat and he felt like he could combust with the wordless stares Cole and Felicity fixed on their laps.

Until—Cole's chair creaked as he stood from it, turning the corner of his desk as he locked eyes with Dream, who stared back at him; half-horrified, half-surprised. “Get up, c'mon,” Dream quickly complied before being engulfed in a tight embrace. It took him a few seconds before reciprocating, but his arms found their way around Cole's frame as he hugged him just as tight, more especially when Cole said, “You do have my blessing, Dream. ‘Course you do.”

“Thank you.” Dream's whisper sounded through an incomparable elation; one that could only come from the feeling of being accepted into a family as loving as George's.

“Fel?” Cole withdrew one arm from Dream's shoulder, extending it towards Felicity who readily jumped out of her seat before walking over to them. “What are you saying, then?”

“Oh my god...” Felicity's face was flushed, tears brimming her eyes as she cradled the side of her cheek before joining their embrace. “...of course, you have my blessing—every single one of them and more—of *course*.” Her voice was muffled against Dream's chest, but he heard every syllable

and clutched them alongside Cole's own, revelling at the surmounting tenderness that circled the three of them in the tiny space of this study.

"You crying?" Cole asked Felicity, through a sniffled laugh.

"Yes," Felicity puled. "I'm a right emotional mess right now, actually."

All three of them were. All three of their voices muffled in their tightening embrace; holding Felicity's offer, Dream's confession, and the blessings asked and given within their fusing souls.



The October sun cast its rays through the windowpanes, accentuating the newfound glow in George's complexion; the first thing Dream always hoped to catch when adjusting to the morning.

It had been a month since George's detox and the clarity in his mind remained. It had been a month since Dream asked for Cole's and Felicity's blessings and it became more and more prevalent as Dream realized how badly he wanted to keep waking up next to George, like this, every single morning, for the rest of his life.

"Morning," George slurred, his smile reaching sleep heavy eyelids; his bare limbs tangling with Dream's own under the soft linen as they moulded into each other's arms. "Are you ready?" George brushed a kiss against Dream's cheekbone, noticing the crease of confusion in his eyebrow. "To be crowned King of Vulcan?"

From that morning onwards; to sporting what used to be Sebastian's royal mantle over the suit his mother loved Dream in, to Felicity walking him from the main doors and towards the throne, to the Archbishop chanting the formalities, to catching Sapnap's exclamation when it was too early to cheer, to singling-out George's beaming grin in the crowd of the Kingdom's warriors, and to the crown being lowered onto his head, Dream felt *inundated* with love—from George, from his family, and from his realm.

His warriors had tackled him to the ground the moment he stepped out of the common house, showering him in devotion that had him pinned to the ground with a crushing weight. But Dream couldn't feel the physical pain of it all—not when the realization struck that this was the loyalty he was to receive for the remainder of his reign.



It was a moment too monumental for George to leave Dream's side. And although he would eventually have to let Dream return to Vulcan, George wanted to give him the present he had been working on. Since having come out of his detox, George placed his distractions into something he loved doing before he had lost his passion to drugs and alcohol.

Sitting Dream on the piano bench, George settled beside him. "I wrote you a song," He beamed up at Dream, cracking the grin he expected to procure on Dream's face.

"George..." Dream half-warningly said.

"It's for everything that you've done. For me. For...us." George unpromptedly giggled, a soft pleasuring noise that he couldn't suppress from the love bathing the sky that day. "And for everything you've done for yourself." He straightened his back, lightly sprinkling his fingers over the ivory bones. "You ready, my King?"

Dream stifled a bashful laugh but offered a faint nod.

George didn't waste a second in delivering the composition, not a single note missed, Dream being right by his side aiding the passion through each brushed chord. *Each* note kissed Dream's ears in the way George had hoped it would; feeling the gradual weight of Dream's head on his shoulder as the song progressed.

George's fingers slowly came off the keys when the last chord rang out through the room, encircling their bodies, sinking Dream's head further onto George's shoulder.

George tucked his chin, trying to get a look at Dream, barely catching his gaze. "D'you like it?"

Just as quietly as it was posed, "Loved it." Dream softly replied, "I never used to understand music. Not really." George's brows knitted slightly as he dipped his head down, finally catching a fraction of Dream's face; noticing the blushed cheeks and the singular tear that rolled down his cheek. "But it makes sense when you play. That was us, wasn't it?"

George's heart swelled at the tone Dream spoke with. "Yeah," He brushed his cheek against Dream's forehead, speaking against the skin. "In the key of Chopin."

Dream let out a content breath. "Yeah, I noticed that, too." He sank so his upper half was now in George's lap. George wrapped his arms around Dream, holding him as tenderly as Dream simulated. "Noticed how...it began unsure, splotchy..." George's smile was faint, growing with every word escaping Dream's hushed tone. "...quick and abrupt for a second," George pressed a gentle kiss against his arm. "and then quiet...soft," Dream squeezed George's knee, fiery breath against his thigh. "Quick again. Fast—visceral," He pressed his tear-stained eyes onto the fabric of George's slacks. "And then quiet...so, so fucking quiet."

George laid another tender kiss atop Dream's head. "S'all quiet now, Dream. All quiet."



While Dream was in Vulcan, celebrating his kingship with his warriors, George was in the kitchen speaking with his father, Quackity, and Felicity. Banter to laughter to aimless talk, everything and all that pumped the easiness of this day.

George had noticed something, lately. How every day—most of them, at least—was getting easier. Waking up didn't feel like a task. Water felt good going down his throat. Each meal was savoured. Laughing became brainless. *Living*, George constated, *was sort of enjoyable again*.

"Big yawn, Q." Felicity ruffled his hair as she passed by him, earning a swat of Quackity's hand. "Gonna head back to Terra now, men." She bowed her head.

"I'll walk you out. I'm going to bed, anyway. *Knackered* as fuck."

Felicity snickered, "'*Knackered*.'"

"They talk so weirdly," Quackity said to her.

"Sure, yeah, just talk about us like we're not in the room," George said as Felicity waved him off, disappearing behind the doorway of the kitchen.

"Like you didn't just demolish *my* wine," Cole added.

"Screw your bloody wine, mate!" Felicity's poorly accented voice echoed down the hall, travelling to them, resulting in George mimicking her voice to Cole, who earned a shake of his father's head.

“Dream not staying the night?” Cole asked after setting his wine glass onto the counter.

George huffed, digging his palm into the edge of the marble before shaking his head. “No, but I might go there. After he’s finished with dinner.”

A small silence passed them; soft and comfortable as it always were.

“When d’you...” George chewed on his bottom lip, gaze wavering over the counter. “...you and mum know you wanted to get married?”

The question hit Cole just as hard as it had George when he was thinking of asking it. George couldn’t lie and say that the thought hadn’t been on his mind since having that dream. Since having witnessed Dream handle a situation as grim as his detox. Since having been around Dream through what others would deem a short time, yet enough for George to realize that he couldn’t see himself having that life with *anybody* else.

And on the off chance that he was wrong, though George highly doubted it, at least he’d have tested his chances—this lifelong promise, with Dream.

Cole smirked. “Why do you ask?”

George pushed down his own smile. “Just wondering.”

“Mhm,” Cole directed his grin at his wine glass. “Um...few years.” He nodded before reconnecting their gaze. “But if I had it my way, I’d have done it within the first year of meeting her.”

George’s brows shot up. “Oh, you were that sure, were you?”

“Sure,” Cole shrugged shamelessly. “Since the first day I met her, actually.”

George rolled his eyes. “Oh, come on—”

“No, I’m serious.” Cole nodded. “Sometimes, that just sort of happens with some people. Better to have tried than to not know at all.” He tipped his wine glass at George. “Trăiască viața and long live love, my son. Life’s too short to hesitate.”

He scrunched his nose at Cole’s usual cheesiness, making sure to add the Romanian roots of the Kingdom through it. Yet despite Cole’s corny statement, “*long live life*” derived a smile from George.

“Are you going to tell me why you asked, now?” Cole tilted his head to the side, smiling knowingly at his son. “Hm,” He chuckled knowingly, to himself, though George suppressed a laugh of his own. “You have my ‘okay’, you know? To marry him.” George stiffened in his seat. “If you’re sure that’s what you want.”

George swallowed before giving him a curt nod. “I know that’s what I want.”

Cole broke into a grin as he spread out of his arms, “Well, there you go.” He drained the last bit of the wine from his glass before disposing of it in the sink.

“Thank you, by the way. For presenting Fel with the idea of walking Dream to the throne.” Cole waved it off slightly. “Seriously. He would never think of asking for it himself, so thank you.” George sighed out, “For loving him ‘cause I do.”

Cole chuckled lightly. “Not a tough thing to do. He’s a good man.”

George received a squeeze goodbye from Cole before he was left alone to his thoughts in the kitchen. For once, thoughts that tinted his cheeks pink as he imagined a scene that would end in something resembling that dream. His imagination ran wild as he grabbed the wine bottle, reaching for the cap, screwing it on and heading down to the cellar to place it back on its rack.

15 October.

Dream’s coron

The felt tip of his pen ceased against the page of his journal as a realization struck him. The reason behind his journaling; writing to avoid the crash—a relapse. There was none. *He didn’t even fucking think about it.* George let out a punched-out breath as he sunk back in his chair.

~~*Dream’s coron*~~ *I grab the bottle of unfinished wine. I screw the cap on and return it to the shelf. No one was around. I could’ve drank. I didn’t even think about it. Admittedly, I’m thinking about it now, but not in that sense. No, not in the sense that an itch begs to surface where I want to put this pen down and unscrew the cap. No, I’m staying here. I’m staying right here with not much effort.*

George broke into a grin.

I’m staying right here. And I’m thinking about all of it, sober. I’m living through this moment with a clear mind. With a clear mind, I witnessed Dream get crowned a King, a title that was always rightfully his. With a clear mind, I held Dream as he cried tears of happiness from his success, from his golden heart.

With a clear mind, I write, I live—trăiască viața.



31 October.

Sun’s shining a tad bit brighter today. I used to hate the way it interrupted my sleep, but it embellishes the green irises of my lover, so I suppose I don’t hate it all that much. And he seems to like the way my sunlit eyes resemble “a pool of honey.” His words, not mine. Should I be his honey, I am crystallized tomorrow. I leave 20 and enter 21. I used to love the grandiose bit of parties. Feeling like a stranger amongst a crowd, feeling whole amongst my friends. And with the essence of Helios and Iris in the details, it’s going to be made a big deal, I’m sure of it.

Amidst the chaos of planning for George’s birthday in a tent that seemed to have reduced in size with more and more warriors stepping in and out to fetch materials, Dream *finally* spotted a familiar face.

“Are these...red?” Niki blinked up at one of her warriors. “Sorry—I was just *so* sure we were planning for a *Water* born’s birthday and now, correct me if I’m wrong, but last I *fucking checked* —”

“Niki, Niki,” Dream placed a hand on her shoulder, causing her to let out a stressed breath. He flicked his gaze from her and to the warrior. “Hey, man, listen, if you could just...I don’t know, go back to the fabric shop and ask for tones of blue, that’d be great—sorry, fuck—” He tore his eyes from the already departing warrior, who didn’t look happy to be going back and forth from Salacia to the Village. “Jesus, are you...” His creased forehead relaxed when he caught her stifling a laugh, deriving an unsteady one of his own. “...are you laughing? Are you having a mental breakdown—

how did you go from yelling—”

“You said...*fabric shop* ?”

“Isn’t that what it’s called—” Niki burst out laughing. “—what the fuck, *tell me* instead of just laughing at me,” He failed to suppress a laugh that dwelled in with hers.

“Haberdashery,” Niki sputtered.

“Niki...” Dream blinked at her. “...how the *hell* am I supposed to get *Haberdashery* off the top of my head?”

“How do you not?” Karl chimed in, passing Niki a piece of paper. “The list for the rest of the supplies, Queen Eurus.” He bowed his head, earning her playful shove from the formal term before she left the men.

Before they could greet each other, Max reached the pair, “Prince Terra,” He placed a hand on Dream’s shoulder. “King Vulcan.”

Dream chuckled, “Max, what’s the...?”

“Right. Just wondering how many bottles are to be at each table?”

Karl and Dream instantaneously locked gaze; on guard for the same, undisclosed reason. Yet, as they both stepped forward to say something, the root of their concern was obvious.

“Not at every table, but—” Dream began as Karl said, “Two and none at table one.”

“*None* at table one? Alex just told me table one had the special privilege of three to four—”

Karl snickered, “Fucking Alex.” biting down his grin.

Dream fought back a smile. “Yeah, no, um. None at table one, please.”

“Are you...sure—”

“What’s going on?” George’s voice seeped in their space, ceasing both Karl and Dream in place. With a hand on the small of Dream’s back and one around Karl’s bicep, George glimpsed up at Max. “Oh, hey, mate.”

“King George. You’re...sat at table one, are you not?”

George jutted his bottom lip at Karl. “You’d know.”

Karl cleared his throat, avoiding Max’s gaze. “Yeah, he is.”

“So, you’re sure about...no champagne bottles, at all?”

Dream’s eyes fluttered shut just as a whispered profanity left Karl’s space.

“Is that what these men have told you?” Although Dream had just then opened his eyes, he could tell George had asked that through a smug smile.

Karl cleared his throat, placing a hand on Max’s shoulder. “Why don’t I walk you through the tent, give you a little tour, we’ll recircle back to them later, yes?”

"I—okay." Max sighed, following behind Karl.

Dream caught Karl's muted "*good luck*" through the raise of his eyebrows before the chestnut-haired prince disappeared with their bartender. He hesitantly met George's gaze once he moved in front of Dream.

"Lover?"

"George—"

"What d'you think you're doing?"

"Listen—"

"Why are you treating me like I'm on suicide watch but for alcohol?" George pocketed his hands, tilting his chin up to look at him. "Dream—"

"I know you're thinking I don't believe you, but it's not that. I just don't want things to be hard on you for your birthday. I want it to go perfectly—"

"And a few bottles of champagne isn't going to make me relapse, Dream, I—" George took in a quiet breath. "Look, I don't want to fight—"

Dream huffed, "Me neither." stepping forward to cradle George's face. "I'm sorry. I should've asked you."

"It's fine, it's fine," George's hands met Dream's own as he brushed the pads of his thumbs over the warm skin. "I think...I haven't given you a reason to *not* think that I'm unsteady in situations as such. Yet. And that's because...actually, you know what?"

"What?"

"I want you to read something of mine when we get home later, okay?" Dream's brows knitted, but he nodded.

Dream felt bad the moment he doubted George because he remembered that talk they had when George was going through his lowest point. Through red-rimmed eyes, through his relapse, when George had explained his hurt for Dream not having believed him, when at the time of Dream's defiance, George *had* been sober.

And he remembered that George would never be able to recover, were it not for Dream's faith, as well as his own; those things going hand-in-hand with their bond.

"Yeah?" George quirked an eyebrow at him.

"Yeah."

"Kay," George chuckled. "Now, go tell the nice man we can have drinks at our table." Dream scoffed out a terse laugh at the tone George used, as if he were coaxing a child, mockingly but playful. "Seriously," He gently withdrew Dream's hands from his face. "before Quackity kills me for it."

"You're *sure*—"

"Go." George urged. Dream shot him a sly look before side-stepping him, receiving a small tap from George's hand on his ass. Dream whirled around, lips slightly agape as he searched for the

room for anyone who would have caught the impish touch. Catching Dream's surprise, George added through a giggle, "I love you."



"Fuck, I'm sorry." Dream sighed, looking up from the entry George had ripped out of his journal.

The guilt for having not believed George, straight off the bat, grew and grew as he read over George's words following his chat with Cole. How each drunk breath leaving his father's mouth didn't rouse him to empty what was left of that wine bottle.

George moved around on Dream's lap where they settled on the ottoman. "S'okay," He smiled softly, carding his fingers through Dream's hair. "Cole never finishes a single bottle of wine, so it's probably still down there. If you wanna check."

"Absolutely not," Dream quickly said, scarcely offended at the proposition. "No. I don't need to. I believe you. Should have believed you. I *do* believe you."

George giggled, cupping Dream's face before reaching in for his lips, capturing them with his own in a lingering, sweet embrace. "I know you do, idiot. I know you do."



1 November.

I was born 21 years ago today. My love is asleep next to me. I slept well, myself. I don't know what it is exactly, this feeling I'm having, but it feels good. I think I feel good. And I think looking for the root of it will only ruin that feeling. So, I'll stick with what I know. Which is that I feel good.

From the beginning of the night; getting ready, shrugging on his royal mantle, placing the crown on Dream's head after Dream did the same to him, to attending the boisterous event in the name of his birthday, from the love and warmth felt in every inch and corner of the tent, through the dancefloor when Dream spun and twirled and swayed George, to the beautiful chaos of Quackity initiating a cake fight shortly after George delved the knife through the icing—all of it mellowing down as 21 years of living girded George.

All of it—all the tenderness that felt so agonizing that agony dwelled into happiness.

It almost made George *feel* drunk.

Drunk off of this feeling of purified joy—through the laughter of Quackity who smeared cake into his face, alongside Felicity's and Cole's scoldings that they were ruining the spread of his birthday attire, through Karl stealing him from Dream, with the help of Niki, so Karl and George could claim the floor with their favoured dance routine.

This drunkenness continued to live within Dream's slung arm over George's shoulders, heavy with love, as he clutched George to his side, intoning, "*My lover turned twenty-one, today!*" earning a chorus of cheers from drunk villagers by the pub and others that sought out Dream's utterances.

"Oh my g—shut *up*, Dream." George giggled, hiding his face against Dream's chest.

Dream feigned a gag. "Don't rub your cake-smeared face all over my *suit*."

"Oh, is this a problem?" George ran his fingers through his hair, sticky with icing before smearing them on Dream's cheek; a sense of déjà-vu clicking in as a bittersweet recall. "This bothering

you?”

“Okay, that’s enough.” Dream withdrew his arm from George’s shoulder, grabbing his waist before throwing George over his shoulder.

“*Dream*—this is so embarrass—” George’s laugh was choked through a grunt as his stomach dug against Dream’s shoulder. “—embarrassing—*put me down.*” He stifled his chuckles against Dream’s shoulder blades. Dream wholly ignored his complaints, walking the both of them back to Salacia.

An innocent shower to clear the cake from George’s face turned lewd when wet kisses transpired into soft lovebites on necks and titillating grips on love handles. The coursing water above turned ice-cold as George’s palms dug against the glass door of the shower; Dream’s scalding clutch at George’s waist burning with the increased pace of his thrusts. Grunts and moans filled the glass box which steamed with their high and concurrent comedown; sheen white sins dripping down the fogged-up glass and the arch of George’s back.

Getting dressed after their shower, Dream said, “Don’t get too comfortable,” swiftly pocketing something in his black cargo pants.

“Why...?” George’s brows slowly drew together, an unsure smile playing at his lips.

“I need you to come back to Vulcan with me.” Dream drew in his bottom lip, pushing down a grin. “I have a birthday present for you.”

George smirked, slowly pointing over Dream’s shoulder to the bathroom. “That...wasn’t it?”

A laugh was quickly stifled, Dream shook his head. “‘Course not. That’s just a regular night for us.”

George tongued the inside of his cheek, complexion flushed at the call-out that only exposed the both of them for their incessant carnal desires.

“Wanna go now?” Dream extended a hand at George, who glimpsed down at it before interlacing their fingers.

“You and your presents...” George tilted his head to the side. “...I’m a little scared, I’ll admit.”

“Don’t worry,” Dream brushed his knuckles against George’s cheekbone. “I think you’ll like this one.”



“*Dream.*”

“Sorry, watch out.” Dream laughed from behind him, keeping a gentle clasp over George’s eyes as he guided George into a room.

“Oh, yeah, thanks for the heads-up, like, ten years later—” Another laugh from Dream coursed one out of George, which he quickly tried to conceal. “—can I open?” He whined through a huff.

Dream hummed. “Yeah, but one more thing?” Before George could say anything, the unspoken words were captured in Dream’s lips as he lightly juttet George’s chin to him, transferring a lingering kiss.

“Idiot.” George breathed out with a smile.

“Alright.” Dream chuckled, “Open.” withdrawing his hand.

George squinted, at first, adjusting his eyes to Violette’s study. Brows furrowed, he slowly turned around to face Dream. “Is the gift...somewhere in this room?”

Dream held his smile high, crossing his hands behind his back with a pompous posture. “It *is* the room.”

The colour was immediately drained from George’s face as he stared back, speechless. Dream giggled softly, head tipped to the side as he reeled his cinched eyes over George’s countenance.

“Are you mad—Dream, I can’t—you can’t do that.” George spun on his heel, taking in the room as if he hadn’t been here multiple times. He supposed it was the slow acceptance of Dream’s gift; making him realize that this space was to be *his*. “...Dream.”

“George.” His name sounded through Dream’s grin, which George captured when he turned to face him again.

“This is your *mother’s* study.”

“It *was*.” Dream nodded. “In a way, it always will be. But,” George allowed Dream to tug him into a loose embrace. “I think she would’ve wanted it to go to someone who had the same love for books as she did. George, I can’t think of anyone more deserving.”

“Fel, for starters.” George was aghast, stealing glimpses of the room.

“I already asked Felicity. She *politely* declined. Said she was too emotionally attached to her own study. And that *I* knew of someone who would do my mom’s legacy the most justice.” Dream’s cheekbones grew prominent, a chuckle followed by George’s heavy sigh. “Cole told me you weren’t using Anthea’s study. That you didn’t feel as if it was ever yours to have.” He shrugged, overlooking the room briefly. “I figured, instead of locking this place up for good, why not turn it into your study?”

“Oh my god...” George noiselessly said, crashing his forehead against Dream’s chest.

“And...*that* way, we’ll get to spend more time together, as well.” Dream tenderly spoke in the nest of George’s hair. “This place suits you, George.”

George squeezed Dream’s middle. “You’re insane.”

Dream’s chest jerked against George as he chuckled, “Just a little.”

“Why?” George pulled away from him, clutching onto the fabric of Dream’s jacket. “Why, Dream?”

Dream’s brows furrowed, the question striking him as rhetorical. “Because I love you, George. God, if I could put into words how much I love you, I—” He bit his tongue, momentarily lingering in his thoughts before his words glided off a tongue dipped in gold, “George, sometimes you’ll do something as simple as touch my arm, as simple as offering me a brief glance—and it has me *completely* undone.” George drew in a shaky breath, not having to reply to know Dream would wholeheartedly explain. “It *still baffles* me, waking up next to you, realizing how fucking lucky I am that you’re the first thing I get to see...*every* morning.” George’s welling eyes fluttered shut as Dream cradled his face. “I still get speechless around you, still trip over my words, still get that

same sinking feeling of crowding butterflies in my stomach. Same ones I got when we first started talking. Do you remember how much of a mess I was around you?" A laugh sputtered past George's lips, "You *still* do that to me." tears rolled down George's cheeks when he resettled his gaze on Dream. "You mean so much more to me than you'll ever know." George leaned up against him, foreheads pressed, breaths colliding in returned love. "And I can't wait to spend the rest of our lives proving that to you."

George's breath stuttered at the last statement. Although a part of him hoped that Dream hadn't caught on, he obviously did; pulling the both of them apart slightly to look down at George.

"Are you alright?"

George sniffled, blinking his tears away from Dream. "Y-yeah. I'm good—I—"

"You're not. What's going on?"

"I'm good. I'm just..." George gritted his teeth through quivering lips. "...God, this is gonna sound..." He deflected his gaze. "...so *fucking stupid*."

Dream chuckled, wrapping his hands around George's biceps. "Try me."

Unable to stop the course of his tears, what with Dream looking at him in the way that made his heart grow twice its size, and with the loving grip on his arms, George huffed out, "I've been thinking about that dream a lot lately. The-the one about m-marriage and...all that dumb stuff."

Dream cocked his head with a soft laugh, "Dumb stuff?"

George lightly hit his chest. "Shut up, I'm digressing."

"Don't." Dream coaxed. "Tell me how you really feel. About all of it."

George held his breath; one that contained all of his secret desires for the life he wanted him and Dream to have, ever since *knowing* him, *loving* him.

"I guess I've been...playing scenarios in my head...in, um, in relation to that, and..." George shook his head, looking down at the space between them. "...I guess it just...everything you were saying sort of sounded like you were going to...um..." He shook his head again, covering his face with his hands. "...this is so fucking stupid, Dream. Let's just—" Muffled into the space of his teary palms, George desisted all attempts to continue; feeling the most vulnerable he ever had.

Dream's hand left George's biceps to wrap his wrists, slowly bringing them down. "What did it sound like, George?" He dipped his head down, searching for George's eyes, reluctantly receiving crystallized honey. "Like...I was going to propose?"

"Fuck." George collided his forehead against the curve of Dream's neck.

"George," Dream gently urged, tugging at his waist. "Look."

George squeezed his eyes shut, reluctantly drawing his face from Dream's neck to glimpse down at the object Dream had wedged between the both of them.

And when his eyes steadied themselves on the black, velour box, George could've sworn he momentarily blacked out from pure shock. He clutched the collars of Dream's jacket, glancing up at him; wide-eyed, mouth agape.

“Dream—”

“Way to ruin the surprise.” Dream teasingly said before breaking into a light laugh, green irises glossing over with tears.

But even if he had a self-imposed head-start, nothing could’ve prepared George to watch Dream slowly get down on one knee in front of him.

“Dream, s-stop—”

Dream clipped open the box. George’s hand clamped over his mouth, a vicious course of tears running down his flushed cheeks. Dream drew in his bottom lip, unable to stop the grin that etched his face as he glanced up at George; glazed over eyes between the two of them.

“Will you?” Dream’s tongue slicked the tear that slipped onto his curved lips. “Marry me?”

George’s chest felt like it was up in flames, descending him down to the floor as he landed on his knees in front of Dream. Using his free hand, perforated with nerves to shakily cradle Dream’s cheek, George locked their gaze; tears ceasing their words, deriving soundless chuckles of their indescribable joy.

George could only manage a nod at first, having Dream pull him onto his lap where they remained in each other’s embrace.

“Yes.” George shakily whispered, “Yes,” fingers coursing through Dream’s hair, “Yes,” before they gently clutched the blonde threads. “I love you,” Simultaneous constrictions around their frames, pressing against each other as if there was more space to prevail. “I love you so fucking much.”

He thinks he can barely breathe, from his emotions resembling an overflowing fountain; its filter lost, irreparable beyond rescue.

George didn’t realize how fast he was breathing, how fast his heart was racing, how much of it all he was *letting* himself feel until Dream pulled away slightly; cupping his face, scarcely lifting it up to peer into his eyes: a shared glossiness of sterile bliss between the two of them.

“Hey,” Dream sniffled, brushing his thumbs over merciless tears. “You okay? What’s wrong?” Asked through a fearless grin, *knowing* that nothing was *genuinely* wrong—*how could it be, at this moment, between them.*

George feels emotional. He feels overwhelmed. Because this was him. This was *all* him. He hadn’t taken anything. *This was all him.*

Breath ragged to the point that he couldn’t control it, George was borderline hyperventilating. “Noth—nothing. I’m just freaking out.”

He was feeling everything.

Dream stared back wordlessly, smile still steady as he slowly shook his head, “Wh—”

George clutched Dream’s face between his hands, pressing their foreheads. “I feel good—really good.”

He’s looking into Dream’s eyes and Dream is looking into his—and George feels everything.

“Yeah?”

George could only muster a nod.

He feels reborn.

Heart beating faster than it ever had on any drugs, mouth dry from the inability to catch his breath the longer this pure joy settled within him, George susurrated, “I feel alive, Dream.” *elated with a high he doubts he’ll ever come down from*, “I feel alive.”

Dream looked into George’s eyes; a marvelled gaze behind the feeling of their souls drowning in an endless pool of everlasting ecstasy.

A high, a euphoria, a nirvana—*simultaneously reached*.

2 November.

It's midnight following my birthday. My fiancé is asleep next to me. And I feel reborn in more ways than one. And I think it's because I found the root of that undetermined feeling from earlier.

It's him.

It could only ever be him.

Chapter End Notes

imagine getting engaged at 21 couldn't be me they're craaaazy. anyway,

it's over! no waaaay. this was good, this was a good ride lmaooo.

big thank u to the [beloved](#) your loyalty to beta read this during ur exam szn, u are crazy and i adore you, kith x

thank u for the nice! silent readers and non-silent readers, appreciate all yours endlessly! treat yourself really fucking good, every single day, a little treat or a big one, up to you always.

'till the next one. all love x [24](#)

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